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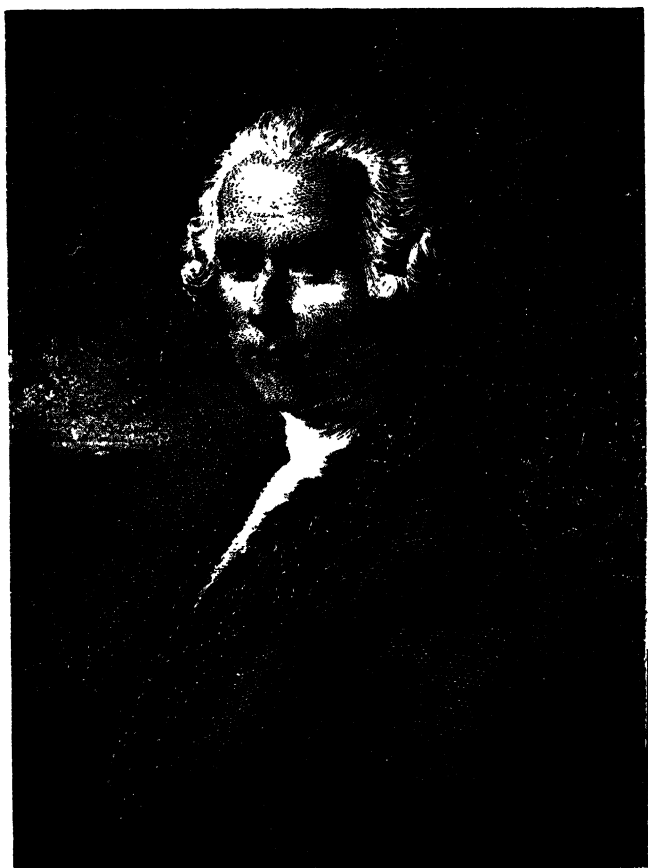
By GEORGE BRANDES

In Six Vols. illustrated.

- I. THE EMIGRANT LITERATURE.
- II. THE ROMANTIC SCHOOL IN GER-  
MANY.
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HONI & LIVERIGHT, INC., NEW YORK





ROUSSEAU

MAIN CURRENTS IN  
NINETEENTH CENTURY  
LITERATURE

BY  
GEORGE BRANDES

IN SIX VOLUMES ILLUSTRATED

I  
THE EMIGRANT LITERATURE

BONI & LIVERIGHT, INC., NEW YORK  
LONDON: WILLIAM HEINEMANN LTD.

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*Printed in Great Britain*

*To the Memory*  
*of*  
HANS BRÖCHNER



## INTRODUCTION

It is my intention in the present work to trace the outlines of a psychology of the first half of the nineteenth century by means of the study of certain main groups and movements in European literature. The stormy year 1848, a historical turning-point, and hence a break, is the limit to which I purpose following the process of development. The period between the beginning and the middle of the century presents the spectacle of many scattered and apparently disconnected literary efforts and phenomena. But he who carefully observes the main currents of literature perceives that their movements are all conditioned by one great leading movement with its ebb and flow, namely, the gradual fading away and disappearance of the ideas and feelings of the preceding century, and the return of the idea of progress in new, ever higher-mounting waves.

The central subject of this work is, then, the reaction in the first decades of the nineteenth century against the literature of the eighteenth, and the vanquishment of that reaction. This historic incident is of European interest, and can only be understood by a comparative study of European literature. Such a study I purpose attempting by simultaneously tracing the course of the most important movements in French, German, and English literature. The comparative view possesses the double advantage of bringing foreign literature so near to us that we can assimilate it, and of removing our own until we are enabled to see it in its true perspective. We neither see what is too near the eye nor what is too far away from it. The scientific view of literature



provides us with a telescope of which the one end magnifies and the other diminishes; it must be so focussed as to remedy the illusions of unassisted eyesight. The different nations have hitherto stood so remote from each other, as far as literature is concerned, that they have only to a very limited extent been able to benefit by each other's productions. For an image of the position as it is, or was, we must go back to the old fable of the fox and the stork. Every one knows that the fox, having invited the stork to dinner, arranged all his dainties upon a flat dish from which the stork with his long bill could pick up little or nothing. We also know how the stork revenged himself. He served his delicacies in a tall vase with a long and slender neck, down which it was easy for him to thrust his bill, but which made it impossible for the fox, with his sharp muzzle, to get anything. The various nations have long played fox and stork in this fashion. It has been and is a great literary problem how to place the contents of the stork's larder upon the fox's table, and *vice versa*.

Literary history is, in its profoundest significance, psychology, the study, the history of the soul. A book which belongs to the literature of a nation, be it romance, drama, or historical work, is a gallery of character portraits, a storehouse of feelings and thoughts. The more momentous the feelings, the greater, clearer, and wider the thoughts, the more remarkable and at the same time representative the characters, so much the greater is the historical value of the book, so much the more clearly does it reveal to us what was really happening in men's minds in a given country at a given period.

Regarded from the merely æsthetic point of view as a work of art, a book is a self-contained, self-existent whole, without any connection with the surrounding world. But looked at from the historical point of view, a book, even though it may be a perfect, complete work of art, is only a

piece cut out of an endlessly continuous web. *Æsthetically* considered, its idea, the main thought inspiring it, may satisfactorily explain it, without any cognisance taken of its author or its environment as an organism ; but historically considered, it implies, as the effect implies the cause, the intellectual idiosyncrasy of its author, which asserts itself in all his productions, which conditions this particular book, and some understanding of which is indispensable to its comprehension. The intellectual idiosyncrasy of the author, again, we cannot comprehend without some acquaintance with the intellects which influenced his development, the spiritual atmosphere which he breathed.

The intellectual phenomena which condition, elucidate, and explain each other, fall of themselves into natural groups.

What I shall describe is a historical movement partaking of the form and character of a drama. The six different literary groups it is my intention to represent may be looked on as six acts of a great play. In the first group, the French Emigrant Literature inspired by Rousseau, the reaction begins ; but here the reactionary are still everywhere mingled with the revolutionary currents. In the second group, the semi-Catholic Romantic school of Germany, the reaction is on the increase ; it is more vigorous and holds itself more aloof from the contemporary struggle for progress and liberty. The third group, consisting of such men as Joseph de Maistre, Lamennais in his strictly orthodox period, Lamartine and Victor Hugo when they (after the restoration of the monarchy) were still mainstays of the Legitimist and clerical party, represents the militant, triumphant reaction. Byron and his English contemporaries form the fourth group. It is this one man, Byron, who produces the revulsion in the great drama. The Greek war of liberation breaks out, a revivifying breeze blows over Europe, Byron falls like a hero in the cause of Greece, and his death

makes a tremendous impression on all the productive minds of the Continent. Shortly before the Revolution of July a change of front occurs among the great authors of France; they form the French Romantic school, which is our fifth group, a new Liberal movement on the roll of whose adherents we find such names as Lamennais, Hugo, Lamartine, Musset, George Sand, &c. The movement passes from France into Germany, and in that country also Liberal ideas are victorious. The writers forming the sixth and last group which I shall depict, Young Germany, are inspired by the ideas of the Greek war of liberation and the Revolution of July, and, like the French authors, see in Byron's great shade the leader of the Liberal movement. The authors of Young Germany, Heine, Börne, Gutzkow, Ruge, Feuerbach, &c., prepare, together with the contemporary French writers, the great upheaval of 1848.

*A household god made of wax, that had been carelessly left standing beside a fire in which precious Campanian vases were baking, began to melt.*

*It addressed bitter complaints to the element. "See," it said, "how cruelly you treat me! To these things you give durability, me you destroy."*

*But the fire answered: "You have nothing to complain of but your own nature. As for me, I am fire, always and everywhere."*

*W. HEINSE.*



# THE EMIGRANT LITERATURE



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# THE EMIGRANT LITERATURE

THE passage of the eighteenth into the nineteenth century was accompanied in France by social and political disturbances of hitherto unknown force and magnitude. The new seed sown by the great ideas and events of the Revolution at first made little or no growth in literature. It was unable to shoot up, for, with but brief interval between, two destroying tyrannies, the dictatorships of the Convention and of the Empire, passed over France, annihilating all personal freedom as they went. The first terrorism cowed, exiled, or guillotined all whose political colouring did not accurately match the then prevailing shade of popular opinion. Aristocracy, royal family, priests and Girondists alike succumbed to it, and men fled to the quiet of Switzerland or the lonely prairies of North America to escape the fate which had destroyed their nearest and threatened themselves. The second terrorism persecuted, imprisoned, shot, or exiled all who would not submit to being silenced (a silence which might only be broken by cheers for the Emperor). Legitimists and Republicans, Constitutionalists and Liberals, philosophers and poets were crushed under the all-levelling roller, unless they preferred, scattered in every direction, to seek a refuge beyond the boundaries of the empire. No easy matter in those days, for the empire followed swiftly upon their heels, rapidly growing, swallowing Germany and Italy in great gulps, until no place seemed secure from its armies, which overtook fugitives even in Moscow.

During both these great despotisms it was only far from Paris, in lonely country places where he lived a life

## THE EMIGRANT LITERATURE

of death-like stillness, or beyond the frontier, in Switzerland, Germany, England, or North America, that the French man of letters pursued his calling. Only in such places could the independent intellects of France exist, and it is by independent intellects alone that a literature can be founded or developed. The first French literary group of the present century, then, a group brought together from all points of the compass, is distinguished by its oppositionist tendency. I do not mean that its members are united on certain fundamental principles, for they are often utterly at variance, but they are all united by their hatred of the Reign of Terror and the Napoleonic autocracy. Whatever they may originally have been, and whatever they become after the restoration of the monarchy, whether literary reformers, reactionary Legitimists, or members of the Liberal Opposition, they are at the beginning of the century one and all opposed to the prevailing order of things. Another thing they all have in common is their difficult position as heirs of the eighteenth century, whose last bequest to them is that Empire against which they protest. Some of them would fain renounce the inheritance and its liabilities, others are ready to accept it if they can repudiate the liabilities, all feel that the intellectual development of the new century must be based upon other assumptions than that of the old. The folding-doors of the nineteenth century open; they stand gazing in intently; they have a presentiment of what they are to see, and believe they see it, and the new shapes itself for each and is interpreted by each according to his gifts and desires. Thus as a body there is something premonitory, precursory about them: they are the bearers of the spirit of the new age.

There was a wider sphere for a literary revival in France than in any other European country, for in France in the eighteenth century literary art had developed into formalism. Social and academic culture had laced it in the iron corset of so-called good taste, into stiff, meagre, regulation proportions. France has long presented the contradiction of being a country with a feverish desire for change in all external arrangements, unable, once it determines to gratify

this desire, to keep within the bounds of moderation, and of being at the same time remarkably stable in everything that regards literature—acknowledging authority, maintaining an academy, and placing rule and regularity above everything. Frenchmen had instituted a Republic and overturned Christianity before it occurred to them to dispute the authority of Boileau. Voltaire, who turns tradition upside down and uses tragedy as a weapon against the very powers whose chief support it had been, namely the autocracy and the Church, never ventures to allow his action to last more than twenty-four hours, or to pass in two different places in the same play. He, who has little respect for anything in heaven or earth, respects the uniform cæsura of the Alexandrine.

It was another people than the French, a people to whom Voltaire had scornfully wished more wit and fewer consonants, who remodelled literature and re-created poetry, while Frenchmen were overturning political systems and customs. The Germans of that day, of whom the French scarcely knew more than that, in humble, patriarchal submission to their petty princes, they drank their beer, smoked their pipes, and ate their sauer-kraut in the corner by the stove, made far greater conquests in the intellectual world than Frenchmen achieved in the geographical. Of all the nations of Europe none save the Germans had had their literary blossoming time in the eighteenth century. It was the second half of that century which witnessed the notable development of poetry between Lessing and Goethe, and the energetic progress of metaphysics between Kant and Schelling. For in Germany nothing had been free save thought.

The French literature of the beginning of the century is, naturally, influenced by Germany, the more so as the nations now first begin to enter into unbroken intellectual communion. The great upheavals, the wars of the Republic and the Empire, jostled the peoples of Europe together, and made them acquainted with each other. But the men most profoundly influenced by foreign surroundings were those for whom these great events meant long, in some cases life-long, exile. The influence of the foreign spirit, only fleeting as far as the soldier was concerned, was

lasting and momentous in the case of the *émigré*. Exiled Frenchmen were obliged to acquire a more than superficial acquaintance with foreign tongues, if for no other reason, in order to be able to give French lessons in the country of their adoption. It was the intelligent *émigré* who diffused knowledge of the character and culture of other lands throughout France, and in seeking a general designation for the literary phenomena of this period, it would scarcely be possible to find a better than the one I have adopted: "The Emigrant Literature."

The name must not be taken for more than it is—a name—for it would be foolish not to class along with the works of *émigrés* proper, kindred writings by authors who, though they did not live in Paris, perhaps not even in France, yet were not exiles; and, on the other hand, some of the works written by *émigrés* are distinctly not products of the renovating and fertilising literary movement, but belong to the anti-liberal literature of the Restoration period.

Nevertheless the name may fitly be applied to the first group of French books which ushers in the century. The *émigré*, as already remarked, inevitably belongs to the opposition. But the character of his opposition varies, according to whether it is the Reign of Terror or the Empire to which he objects, and from the tyranny of which he has escaped. Frequently he has fled from both, in which case the motive of his opposition is of a compound nature. He possibly sympathised with the Revolution in its early stage as curtailing the power of the monarchy, and his desire may be a moderate republic; in this case he will be inspired by a more passionate ill-will towards the Empire than towards the old Reign of Terror. Whatever the nature of the compound, a double current is discernible in the emigrant literature.

Its direct reaction is against certain mental characteristics of the eighteenth century, its dry rationalism, its taboo of emotion and fancy, its misunderstanding of history, its ignoring of legitimate national peculiarities, its colourless view of nature, and its mistaken conception of religions as being

conscious frauds. But there is also an unmistakable under-current in the direction of the main stream of the eighteenth century; all the authors carry on the great war against petrified tradition, some only in the domain of literature, others in each and every intellectual domain. They are all daring, enterprising natures, and for none of them has the word Liberty lost its electrifying power. Even Chateaubriand, who in politics and religion represents the extreme Right of the group, and who in some of his writings is positively reactionary, takes "*Liberty and Honour*" as his motto; which explains his finally going over to the Opposition. The double current is everywhere discernible, in Chateaubriand, in Sénancour, in Constant, in Mme. de Staël, in Barante, Nodier, &c., and to this subtle correlation of reaction and progress I shall draw attention from the first.

In speaking of the spirit of the eighteenth century it is generally Voltaire's name which rises to our lips. It is he who in most men's minds embodies and represents the whole period; and in as far as the *émigrés* bring about a revulsion against him, they may certainly be said to represent the reaction against the preceding century. Even those among them who are closely related to him intellectually, compulsorily join in the reaction against him, compelled, that is to say, by the spirit of the age; as, for instance, Constant in his book *On Religion*. But among the writers of the eighteenth century there is one who was Voltaire's rival, who is almost his equal, and whose works, moreover, in a much higher degree than Voltaire's, point to an age far ahead of that in which they were written. This man in many ways inspires the Emigrant Literature, and in as far as it descends from Rousseau, and to a certain extent perpetuates his influence, it may be said to perpetuate the preceding century and the Revolution. It is astonishing to what an extent the great literary movements in all the principal countries of Europe at the beginning of the nineteenth century were influenced by Rousseau. Among his spiritual progeny in France in the eighteenth century had been men so unlike each other as St. Pierre, Diderot, and Robespierre,

and in Germany geniuses and men of talent like Herder, Kant, Fichte, Jacobi, Goethe, Schiller, and Jean Paul. In the rising age he influences, among others, Chateaubriand, Mme. de Stael, and later, George Sand, in France; in Germany, Tieck; and in England, Byron. Voltaire influences minds in general, Rousseau has a special power over productive talents, over authors. These two great men exercised an alternating influence upon posterity well-nigh into our own day, when both have been supplanted by Diderot. At the close of last century, Voltaire yielded his sceptre to Rousseau; fifty years later his name returned to honour in France; and now in some of the most eminent writers of that country—take Ernest Renan as an instance—a twofold intellectual tendency is discernible, something of Rousseau's spirit combined with something of Voltaire's. But it is in the writings of Rousseau alone that the great spiritual streams which flow from other countries into France at the beginning of the nineteenth century have their source, and to Rousseau is it due that the literature produced by Frenchmen living in remote provinces or foreign countries, in spite of its antagonism to the spirit which produced and upheld the imperial despotism, remained in touch with the eighteenth century, and was based upon originally French theories.

# I

## CHATEAUBRIAND

THE year 1800 was the first to produce a book bearing the imprint of the new era, a work small in size, but great in significance and mighty in the impression it made. *Atala* took the French public by storm in a way which no book had done since the days of *Paul and Virginia*. It was a romance of the plains and mysterious forests of North America, with a strong, strange aroma of the untilled soil from which it sprang; it glowed with rich foreign colouring, and with the fiercer glow of consuming passion. The history of a repressed, and therefore overpowering and fatal love, was depicted upon a background of wild Indian life, the effect of the whole being heightened by a varnish of Roman Catholic piety.

This story of the love and death of a Christian Indian girl was so admired that its principal characters were soon to be seen adorning the walls of French inns in the form of coloured prints, while their waxen images were sold on the quays of Paris, as those of Christ and the Virgin usually are in Catholic countries. At one of the suburban theatres the heroine figured in savage attire with cock's feathers in her hair, and a farce was given at the *Théâtre des Variétés* in which a school girl and boy, who had eloped, talked of nothing but alligators, storks, and virgin forests in the style of *Atala*. A parody published under the title of "*Ah ! là ! là !*" substituted for the long, gorgeous description of Mississippi scenery an equally lengthy and detailed description of a potato patch—so strange did it seem at that day that an author should devote several pages to the description of natural scenery. But though parodies, jests, and caricatures rained upon the author, he was not to be pitied, such



things being symptoms of fame. With one bound he had risen from complete obscurity to the rank of a celebrity. His name was upon all lips, the name of François René de Chateaubriand.

The youngest of ten children, he was born of an ancient and noble house in St. Malo, Brittany. His father was a stern, dry, unsociable and silent man, whose one passion was his pride of race; while his mother, a little, plain, restless, discontented woman, was God-fearing to the highest degree, a church-goer and a patroness of priests. The son inherited a mixture of both natures.

Sternly brought up in a home where, as he himself expressed it, the father was the terror and the mother the scourge of the household, he was reserved and shy, an obstinate, excitable, melancholy child, early familiar with the unrest of the sea and the music of its storms, never reconciled to the discomfort and coldness of his home. His sister Lucile, the nearest him in age, was his one friend and confidante. Like him, she was of a morbid and passionate temperament, year by year more prone, like Rousseau, to suspect every one of conspiracy against her, and to regard herself as persecuted. In her childhood it was to her brother, in later life to religion, that she turned for protection in these troubles and dangers. At first plain and shy, like her brother, she afterwards became very beautiful; with her pale face and dark hair she was like a lovely angel of death. She passed the greater part of her life in convents; was passionate in her sisterly love, and passionately Catholic; she had considerable poetic talent, and in shyness and romantic excitability she seems to have been the feminine counterpart of her brother. Another sister, Julie, having passed her youth as a gay woman of the world, ended her life in the most saintly self-renunciation. The tendency towards Catholicism seems to have run in the blood of the whole family.

The great constraint of young Chateaubriand's upbringing induced in him a wild longing to be free and his own master, while the perpetual surveillance under which he suffered created an overwhelming, misanthropic desire for

**solitude.** When he ran alone down the stairs of the old manor-house, or went out with his gun, he felt all the passions boiling and seething within him in wild ecstasy at being able to dream and long unrestrainedly. Ill at ease in the society of others, he plunged when alone into dreams of happiness and ambition, the dreams of a poet. In this half-sensuous, half-spiritual dreaming and longing, he created the image of a supernaturally charming woman, a youthful queen, bedecked with flowers and jewels, whom he loved and by whom he was beloved in the balmy, moonlit nights of Naples or Sicily. To awake from these dreams and realise the insignificant little Breton that he was, awkward, unknown, poor and possibly without talent, was torture to him. The contrast between what he was and what he longed to be overwhelmed him.

He was at first intended for the navy, but his unconquerable aversion to discipline proved an insurmountable obstacle, and his thoughts turned to the Church, from which, however, a conviction of his unfitness for a life of renunciation made him draw back. In the depth of his despondency he attempted to commit suicide. An irrevocable family decision put an end to his vacillation ; he was given a commission as sub-lieutenant in the army, and found the life to his liking. As a cadet of a noble family he was presented to Louis XVI., at whose court he witnessed the last glimmer of the old splendour and ceremony of royalty. Two years later the Revolution broke out, and in 1790 rank, titles, and feudal rights were abolished. Chateaubriand gave up his commission, and, as no occupation offered itself under the new order, or disorder, he conceived the fantastic plan of travelling to America to discover the North-West Passage. Without any of the requisite information, without interest or money, he was inevitably soon obliged to abandon this project. But if he did not find the North-West Passage, he did discover a new race, fresh conditions, and new scenery. In his early youth, after reading Rousseau, he had conceived the idea of writing the Epic of Primitive Man, a description of the ways of the savages of whom he knew nothing. Now he was upon their own soil, in their world, and though they

were not as untouched by civilisation as he had imagined, it was not difficult to reconstruct their original condition. The first impression he received of them was undeniably a strange one. On the way from Albany to Niagara, when his guide led him for the first time into the virgin forest, he was seized by one of those transports of delight in his independence which he had felt in his early youth when he went hunting in Brittany. He wandered from tree to tree, to right and left, saying to himself: "Here are no roads, no towns, no monarchies, no republics, no men." Imagining himself to be alone in the forest, he suddenly came upon a score of half-naked, painted savages with ravens' feathers in their hair and rings in their noses, who—marvellous to relate!—were dancing quadrilles to the sounds of a violin played by a little powdered and frizzed Frenchman, once kitchen-boy to a French general, now retained as dancing-master by these savages for a consideration of beaver-skins and bear-hams. What a humiliating introduction to primitive life for a pupil of Rousseau! Subsequent impressions were, fortunately, simpler and more beautiful than this. Chateaubriand purchased clothes and weapons from the Indians, and lived their life for some weeks at least. He was presented to the Sachem, or chief, of the Onondagas (as Byron at a later period was presented to Ali Pasha); he rode through the country, coming here and there upon little European houses, with their pianos and mirrors, close to the huts of the Iroquois; he saw the Falls of Niagara; and in two charming Florida girls found the models for his famous characters, Atala and Celuta.

It was in America that Chateaubriand planned his two brilliant short tales, *Atala* and *René*, and also the long, somewhat slovenly work of which they form part, *Les Natchez*, a great romance dealing with the destruction of an Indian tribe in its struggle with the whites. *Atala* was the first to be completed. After a brief stay in France, where he arrived in January 1792, recalled by the news of the fall of the monarchy and the dangerous position of Louis XVI., he again emigrated, this time to London. He made the first rough drafts of *Atala* and *René* sitting under

the trees in Kensington Gardens, and when he joined the emigrant army on the Rhine, his knapsack contained more manuscript than linen. *Atala* was revised during the halts of the army, and repacked in his knapsack when the march was resumed, his comrades teasing him by tearing the protruding leaves. In the action in which he was wounded in the thigh by a splinter of shell, *Atala* proved the means of saving his life, for two spent bullets glanced off his knapsack. He arrived at Brussels after the destruction of the emigrant army, wounded, emaciated, and ill with fever; his brother, with wife and father-in-law, having meanwhile perished on the scaffold in Paris. His mother and two sisters, of whom Lucile was one, had been imprisoned for a time after his flight. In London, in 1797, he published his *Essai historique sur les Révolutions*, which was written in a comparatively liberal and, as regards religion, a distinctly sceptical spirit. It was the death of his mother, he tells us, which led him back to Christianity, but the reactionary spirit of the times probably contributed quite as much to his change of attitude, and when he returned to France in 1800, after Bonaparte had quelled the Revolution, he carried with him his great work, *Le Génie du Christianisme*, in which *René* was included, and the publication of which coincided with Bonaparte's restoration of Christian worship in France. The book harmonised too well with the plans of the First Consul not to bring its author into favour with that autocrat; Chateaubriand, however, broke with his government after the judicial murder of the Duc d'Enghien in 1804.

These are the principal incidents in the youthful career of the man who became famous in 1800 as the author of *Atala*. His character was even more remarkable than his career. High-spirited, ambitious, vain, and shy, perpetually wavering in his faith in his own powers, he was not only endowed with the self-consciousness of genius, but with an egotism which ignored with absolute indifference all that did not immediately concern himself. He came too late into the world, and was educated under too peculiar circumstances, to have faith in the Revolution or the eighteenth-

century philosophy which partly inspired it. He came into the world too soon to make acquaintance with the science of the nineteenth century, and through it to win a new faith and a new standpoint. He therefore became a kind of Nihilist in the service of the past, a spirit who, as he repeatedly observes, believed in nothing. He adds, when he remembers to do so, "except religion"; but a man is, according to his nature, either a believer or a sceptic, and the idea that it is possible to be a believer in the matter of religion when one believes in nothing else, is a mere delusion, to which the half-educated are specially liable.

Chateaubriand's *Mémoires* are full of the sort of tirade on the vanity of name and fame which we so often meet with in Byron. There is undoubtedly a good deal of affectation in these outbreaks, but they nevertheless betray genuine ennui and persistent melancholy.

"Unable to believe in anything except religion, I am distrustful of all else. . . . The trivial and ridiculous side of things is always the first to show itself to me. In reality neither great geniuses nor great deeds exist for me. . . . In politics the warmth of my conviction does not outlast my speech or pamphlet. . . . In the whole history of the world I do not know a fame that could tempt me. If the greatest honour in the world lay at my feet and I had but to stoop and take it up, I would not take the trouble. If I had been my own creator, I should probably have made myself a woman, out of passion for the sex; or if I had chosen to be a man, I would first of all have bestowed beauty upon myself; then, to provide against ennui, my worst enemy, I would have been a great but unknown artist, using my talent for myself alone. If we set aside all humbug and examine into what it is that gives life real worth, we find only two things of value, religion in combination with talent, and love in combination with youth, that is to say the future and the present; all the rest is not worth the trouble of thinking about. . . . I have no belief in anything except religion. If I had been a shepherd or a king, what should I have done with my staff or sceptre? I should have been equally weary of glory and genius, work and rest, prosperity and adversity. Every-

thing irks me. I drag my weariness painfully after me all day long, and yawn my life away (*et je vais partout bâillant ma vie*)."<sup>1</sup>

How much passion had he not wasted upon fantastic imaginings and poetic dreams before he was reduced to this utter boredom! In *Atala* the passion still wells up like a hot spring, and its spray stings and scalds.

The old Indian, Chactas, tells the story of his youth to a young Frenchman to whom Chateaubriand has given his own second name, René. Chactas, taken captive by a hostile tribe, is condemned to death upon the pyre. The daughter of the chief of the tribe takes a fancy to him and approaches the place where he lies bound. He mistakes her for the maiden whose part it is to solace the prisoner in the last hour before the consummation of the death sentence; but her intention is to release, not to console. He conceives a sudden passion for her, and entreats her to fly with him and be his; she refuses, and, delayed by her opposition, he is recaptured. He is already adorned for the pyre, crowned with flowers, his face painted blue and red, and beads attached to his ears, when Atala delivers him for the second time and escapes with him. The greater part of the book describes this flight, Chactas's desire, and the mingling of passion and reserve in Atala which makes her constantly vacillate between resistance and surrender. Her behaviour is explained when she tells Chactas that her mother, who was seduced by a white man, had her baptized and made her swear to remain unwed. In her anguish at the vow and her despair of being able to keep it, she takes poison, and dies in her lover's arms, comforted by the old missionary in whose hut the pair have taken shelter.

A full impression of the burning passion and lyrical exaltation of the book can only be gained by reading it, nor can we obtain any idea from descriptions and quotations of the power with which the wonderful scenery is described. It is an easy matter, however, to show how much and how instinctively Chateaubriand relied upon a mingling of the terrible with the erotic to obtain his effects. In the principal love scene we have not only a lavish musical

<sup>1</sup> *Mémoires d'Outre-Tombe*, vol. i. p. 207-451; vol. ii. p. 129.

accompaniment of the rattle of snakes, the howling of wolves, the roaring of bears and jaguars, but also a storm which shatters the trees, and impenetrable darkness, torn by flash upon flash of the lightning which finally sets fire to the forest. Round about the lovers the pines are blazing like wedding torches, and Atala is about to yield when a warning flash strikes the ground at her feet. It is after this she takes poison, and the burning passion of her last words to Chactas are in harmony with the conflagration of the forest :

“What torture to see thee at my side, far from all mankind, in these profound solitudes, and to feel an invincible barrier between thee and me ! To pass my life at thy feet, to wait upon thee as thy slave, to prepare thy repast and thy couch in some forgotten corner of the universe would have been my supreme happiness. This bliss I had actually attained to, but could not enjoy. What plans have I not planned ! what dreams have I not dreamed ! Sometimes, looking upon thee, I have been tempted to form desires as wild as they were guilty. I have sometimes wished that thou and I were the only living creatures on earth ; sometimes, conscious of a divinity which arrested my horrible transports, I have wished that divinity annihilated, that, clasped in thy arms, I might fall from abyss to abyss amid the ruins of God and the world.”

Remarkable as these outbursts of irresistible passion are, and novel as is the scenery which throws them into relief, we feel that both would have been impossible if Rousseau had never lived, and if his literary work had not been carried on by another and greater intellect of another nationality.

## II

### ROUSSEAU

ROUSSEAU's chief work as an imaginative writer is *La Nouvelle Héloïse*.

The novelty of the book lay, in the first instance, in the fact that it gave the death-blow to gallantry, and, consequently, to the theory of the French classical period on the subject of the emotions. This theory was that all noble, fine emotions, and chief among them love, were the products of civilisation. It is obvious enough that a certain degree of civilisation was necessary before such a sentiment as love could arise. Until they wore womanly garb women did not exist, but only females, and until there were women there was no love. From this perfectly correct idea had resulted (in the pre-Rousseau period) the belief that the veiling of passion ennobled it and made it worthy. The more it could be shrouded in circumlocutions, hints, and suggestions, the less coarse it was. The morality and the literature of that period were the products of social culture, a culture confined to the highest circles. We need but read Marivaux's plays to find literary evidence of the extent to which courtly formality and refined sentiment were preferred to nature and passion. Marivaux's lovers are always each other's equals in culture, and, what is of still greater importance, in rank. We never find, as in the dramas of our century, the aristocratic lady who loves a man of lower social station, nor such a character, for instance, as Ruy Blas, the lackey who finds favour in the eyes of a Queen. In Marivaux, if a gentleman is disguised as a lackey, or a young lady as a waiting-maid, they always divine each other immediately in spite of their disguise. Their conversation is an incessant pursuit and flight, advance and retreat; it is full of ambiguities and hints and evasions,



masked confessions and suppressed sighs, love-sickness expressed in a becomingly conventional manner. In Rousseau's eyes these mannerisms are as ridiculous as they are artificial. He prefers love, like everything else, in its natural state, and to him love in its natural state is a violent, irresistible passion. In his books we are very far removed from those scenes in Marivaux in which the kneeling lover never forgets to preserve a graceful attitude while pressing the tips of a glove to his lips. For all his chivalry and virtue, St. Preux is an electric battery charged with passion; the first kiss in the Grove of Clarens produces the shock, the conflagration of a thunderbolt; and when Julie, bending towards St. Preux and kissing him, swoons away, it is no coquettish faint of the days of the periwig, but the effect of the overwhelming might of passion upon a young and healthy child of nature.

The second novelty in the book is the inequality in station of the hero and heroine. Julie is the daughter of a nobleman, St. Preux is a poor tutor, a plebeian. Here, as in the *Sorrows of Werther*, the passion of love is connected with the equality-loving plebeian's determination to make a name for himself. This is no chance connection, for passion creates equality, whereas love in fashionable society has a tendency to develop into gallantry.

A third significant feature in *La Nouvelle Héloïse* is that, just as we have passion in place of gallantry and inequality of station in place of similarity of rank, we have also the moral conviction of the sanctity of marriage in place of that honour grounded on aristocratic pride and self-respect, which stood for virtue in fashionable literature. This word, Virtue, little in vogue until now, became with Rousseau and his school a watchword which was in perfect harmony with their other watchword, Nature; for to Rousseau virtue was a natural condition. Following the example of society, French literature had been making merry at the expense of marriage; Rousseau, therefore, defied the spirit of the times by writing a book in its honour. His heroine returns the passion of her lover, but marries another, to whom she remains faithful. Here, as in *Werther*, the lover proper loses the maiden, who is wedded to a Monsieur

Wolmar (the Albert of *Werther* and the Edward of Kierkegaard's *Diary of a Seducer*), a man as irreproachable as he is uninteresting. The moral conviction which is vindicated and glorified in Rousseau as *Virtue*, is the same as that which in Chateaubriand, under the influence of the religious reaction, takes the form of a binding religious vow.

Note, finally, that the watchword *Nature* is to be taken in its literal meaning. For the first time, out of England, we have the genuine feeling for nature in fiction, superseding love-making in drawing-rooms and gardens. Under Louis XV. and the Regency, people passed their time (in real life as well as in books) in boudoirs, where light conversation and light morals were in place. The rooms, like the verses of Voltaire's *Poésies Fugitives*, were adorned with endless multitudes of Cupids and Graces. In the gardens goat-footed Pans embraced slender white nymphs by the side of artificial fountains. In their pictures of the *fêtes-champêtres* of those days, Watteau and the less-gifted Boucher and Lancret have preserved for us these gardens with their shady walks and quiet corners, where courtly gentlemen and gay ladies, clad as Pierrots and Columbines, coquetted and whispered, conscious of being on the right stage for such free and frivolous masquerading. Turn from these to the scenery of *La Nouvelle Héloïse*.

Rousseau's statue stands at this day on a little island lying in the Lake of Geneva, at its narrow southern extremity. The spot is one of the loveliest in the world. Pass the island and cross another bridge and you see the Rhone rush, impetuous and foaming white, out of the lake. A few steps further and you can see its white stream joined by the grey snow waters of the Arve. The rivers flow side by side, each retaining its colour. Far away between two mighty ridges you discern the white snow-caps of Mont Blanc. Towards evening, as those mountain ridges darken, the snows of Mont Blanc glow like pale roses. It would seem as if Nature had gathered together all her contrasts here. Even in the warmest season as you approach the grey, foaming mountain torrents, the air becomes icy cold. In the course of a short stroll you may feel the heat of summer in some sheltered nook, and a few steps farther on

encounter harsh autumn with its cutting winds. One can form no conception of the cool freshness and strength of the air here. Only the sun and the brilliant shimmer of the stars at night recall the south. The latter are not the bright points in a distant sky which they appear to be in the north ; they seem to hang loose in the air ; and the air itself, as one inhales it, feels like a strong massive substance.

Sail up the lake to Vevey. Behind that town the Alpine slopes are clad with the trees and vineyards of southern lands. On the farther side of the lake rise great walls of blue rock, solemn and threatening, and the sun plays in light and shade down the mountain-side. No waters are so blue as those of the Lake of Geneva. As you sail down it on a beautiful summer day, it shines like blue satin shot with gold. It is a fairyland, a dreamland, where mighty mountains cast their blue-black shadows down into the azure waters and a brilliant sun saturates the air with colour. Sail a little farther up the lake to Montreux, where the rock fortress of Chillon, the prison in which mediæval cruelty collected all its instruments of torture, projects into the water. This witness to wild and terrible passions lies in the midst of scenery which may well be called enchanted. The lake is more open here, the view less peculiar, and the climate more southern than at Vevey. One sees sky, Alps, and lake, all melting together in a mysterious blue light. From Montreux walk to Clarens and pause in the chestnut grove which is still called the *Bosquet de Julie*. It is situated on a height from which you look down upon Montreux, lying sheltered and hidden in its bay ; look round and you will understand how it was from this spot that the love of nature spread throughout Europe. We are standing in Rousseau's country, upon the scene of his *Nouvelle Héloïse*. This was the scenery which supplanted that of the Regency.

It is not difficult to trace the relation between Chateaubriand's first work and Rousseau's famous romance. First and foremost Chateaubriand inherits the love of nature ; his strongly coloured pictures of North American scenery have their progenitors in those descriptions of Swiss nature. But there is this difference between Rousseau's and Chateau-

briand's landscapes, that the latter's are much more dependent upon the mood of the hero and heroine. If stormy passions rage in their hearts, the storm rages without also; the characters are blent with their natural surroundings, which they permeate with their passions and moods in a manner quite unknown to the literature of the eighteenth century.

The hero and heroine themselves, being savages, have even less suspicion of gallantry about them, are far more the children of nature than Rousseau's lovers; and although expressions occur again and again which are absurd coming from the lips of a Red Indian, yet many of the love-speeches have a touch of primitive poetry in them, a genus of literature which was entirely unknown in France in the eighteenth century. Take for an example the warrior's love-song beginning with the words: "I will fly so fast that before the day has touched the mountain tops I shall have come to my white dove among the oaks of the forest. I have bound a necklace of beads about her neck—three red beads to speak of my love, three violet beads to speak of my fear, and three blue beads to speak my hope," &c.

The inequality of position between Rousseau's lovers, so typical of that revolutionary time, finds its equivalent in *Atala* in the difference of religion, a matter which in the new century, with its reaction against Voltaire, acquires new importance. The religious reaction also explains the fact that a Catholic vow to remain unwed plays the same rôle in Chateaubriand's story which the dictate of morality does in Rousseau's. We have, then, progress in colouring, in the development of character, in the comprehension of the spirit and racial peculiarities of an uncivilised people, but we have also a deliberate step backward, in the substitution of Catholic conventual piety, with its unnatural renunciation, for morality. Passion is whetted, so to speak, on the altar of Catholicism, and its unnatural suppression creates that unnatural frenzy which causes *Atala*, the charming young Indian girl, who has so long held the desire of her heathen lover in check, to die with a wish on her lips for the annihilation of God and the world, if at that price she can be clasped for ever to his heart.

### III

#### WERTHER

*La Nouvelle Héloïse* appeared in 1761. Thirteen years later, in another country and in very different environments, a youthful genius, who possessed little in common with Rousseau, but who wrote under the influence of his romance and his ideas, published a little book which contained all the merits and none of the defects of *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, a book which stirred thousands upon thousands of minds, which awoke lively enthusiasm and a morbid longing for death in a whole generation, which in not a few cases induced hysterical sentimentality, idleness, despair, and suicide, and which was honoured by being proscribed by a fatherly Danish government as "irreligious." This book was *Werther*. St. Preux has changed his costume, has donned the famous Werther garb, the blue coat and yellow waistcoat, and Rousseau's *belle âme* has passed into German literature as *die schöne Seele*.

And what is *Werther*? No definitions can give any real idea of the infinite wealth of an imaginative masterpiece, but we may briefly say that the great importance of this story of ardent, unhappy love, lies in its being so treated that it gives expression not merely to the isolated passion and suffering of a single individual, but to the passions, longings, and sufferings of a whole age. The hero is a young man of the burgher class; he is artistically gifted, and paints for pleasure, but by profession he is Secretary to a Legation. Goethe has involuntarily made this young man see, and feel, and think as he himself did in his youth, has endowed him with all his own rich and brilliant genius. This transforms Werther into a great symbolic figure; he is more than the spirit of the new era, he is its genius. He is

almost too rich and great for his destiny. There is, perhaps, actually a certain discrepancy between the first part of the book, in which Werther's mind manifests itself in its energetic, youthful health and strength, and the second part, in which he succumbs to circumstances. In the first half there is in Werther more of Goethe himself, who certainly did not commit suicide; in the second, more of that young Jerusalem whose unhappy death inspired the book. But such as he is, Werther is a type. He is not only the child of nature in his passion, he is nature in one of its highest developments, genius. Losing himself in nature, he feels its whole infinite life within himself, and feels himself "deified" thereby. Turn, for instance, to that wonderful entry in his journal written on August 18, 1771. It is as powerful and full of genius as a *Faust* monologue. Read that description of how "the inner, glowing, holy life of nature" opens before him, of how he perceives the "unfathomable powers working and creating in the depths of the earth," of how he yearns to "drink the surging joy of life from the foaming cup of infinity, in order that, as far as his narrow limitations permit, he may taste one drop of the bliss of that being which produces everything in and by itself," and you will understand how it is that, when he begins to feel like a prisoner who sees no way of escape, he is seized by a burning, so to speak, pantheistic, desire to fling his human life away, that he may "rend the clouds asunder with the storm-wind and grasp the billows;" you will feel the justification for his dying exclamation: "Nature! thy son, thy friend, thy lover, approaches his end."

A soul which demands so much room must inevitably be an offence to society, especially when society is hedged in by as many rules as it was at the close of the most social of all centuries. Werther abhors all rules. At a time when poetry was fettered by them, he reduces all its laws to one: "Know what is good and dare to put it into words." An artist, his views on painting are as heretical as his views on poetry. He meets a young brother artist, fresh from the schools, who deafens him with the doctrines of all the famous theorists, Winckelmann and Sulzer amongst others.

This fellow is a perfect terror to him. "Nature alone," he writes, "fashions the great artist. Much may be said in favour of the laws of art, *about as much as may be said in praise of the laws of society*. The artist who observes them will never produce anything bad or absolutely valueless, just as the man who submits to the control of convention and decorum will never be an unbearable neighbour or a remarkable scoundrel; nevertheless, every rule, say what you will, tends to destroy true feeling for nature and to prevent its sincere expression." Werther's detestation of rules explains his abhorrence for all technical and conventional expressions. He gnashes his teeth with annoyance when the prince, who has no artistic taste, brings out some æsthetic platitude in reply to an eager remark he himself has let fall on the subject of art, and he is enraged by the string of ready-made social judgments which Albert has at his fingers' ends. "Why," he cries, "must you people, when you speak of a thing, immediately say, 'it is stupid' or 'it is clever,' 'it is good' or 'it is bad'? What do you mean? Have you investigated into the inner significance of the action? Have you traced its causes, divined its inevitability? If you had, you would not be so ready to pass judgment!" He revolts against the pedantry of the ambassador who cavils at the style of his secretary's despatches, he wishes misfortune may befall the theological blue-stocking who has cut down the pretty hazels in the rectory garden, and he is unreasonably embittered by the arrogance of antiquated erudition, by all lifeless, solemn ceremonial, and by the claims which those of a certain rank in society make on the submission and obedience of their inferiors.

He seeks refuge with children, who "of all things upon earth are nearest to his heart," and with uncultured souls, whose genuine feelings and genuine passions give them a beauty in his eyes which nothing can surpass. Watching the girls fetch water from the well reminds him of patriarchal times, of Rebecca and Eleazer, and when he cooks his own green peas he lives in thought in those Homeric days when Penelope's haughty suitors killed and prepared their own food. Nature enchants and captivates him. If he is not

a Christian, if, as he expresses it, he is not one of those who have been given to the Son—something in his heart telling him that the Father has reserved him for Himself—it is because to him that Father is Nature ; Nature is his God.

Wherever he goes in society he offends against its cold and formal regulations. He is ejected in the most insulting manner from an aristocratic gathering ; he, the plebeian, all unwitting of offence, having remained in his chief's drawing-room after the arrival of distinguished guests. Himself ardently, hopelessly in love, he does what he can to save an unfortunate youth whom an unconquerable and not unrequited passion has driven to offer violence and to murder a rival. Werther's petition is not only rejected by the representatives of the law, but he is himself compelled by the law to bear witness against the man he would so willingly shield and save.

All this, however, is mere minor detail. The woman he loves, and whom he could so easily have won, had no plighted word stood between them, becomes the wife of another ; this is the shock that breaks his heart.

This book represents the full heart, right or wrong, in collision with the conventions of everyday life, its craving for infinity, for liberty, which makes life seem a prison and all society's partition walls seem prison walls. "All that society does," says Werther, "is to paint them for each individual with fair perspectives opening to a wide horizon. The walls themselves are never broken down." Hence this dashing of the head against the wall, these long sobs, this deep despair which nothing but a bullet through the heart can still. On the occasion of their meeting, Napoleon reproached Goethe for having mixed up the love-story with the revolt against society ; the reproach was unreasonable, for the two are indissolubly connected ; it is only together that they express the idea of the book.

Unlike *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, *Werther* is no glorification of the triumph of virtue and deistic piety over natural instincts and passions ; it represents passion running its predestined course. In this tragedy of the human heart, the law-defying being and the lawless passion meet their inevitable doom.



The termination to the story, however, was not of Goethe's invention ; he made use of a manuscript describing the death of young Jerusalem (*vide* Kestner's book on Goethe and Lotte). In its last lines he only altered a single word, as being too vulgar. The manuscript runs, " Barbiergesellen trugen ihn " ; in the book we read, " Handwerker trugen ihn, kein Geistlicher hat ihn begleitet." This sentence in its cutting brevity intimates that a life is at an end, that a human being at war with himself and society, mortally wounded in his deepest sympathies, has succumbed. Mechanics bore him to the grave, middle-class society held pharisaically aloof; no priest accompanied him, for he was a suicide, and had defied the laws of religion; but he had loved the people and had associated with the uncultured, so they followed him to the grave.

It is well known to what an outburst of sentimental literature this work gave rise ; how its passionate emotion turned into heavy sentimentality, as in the case of Clauren, Lafontaine, and Rahbek, the Dane, or was diluted into sickly platonism, as in Ingemann's feeble imitation, *Varners Vandringer*. But *Werther* was not responsible for all this ; absorption in feeling and emotions is only one feature of the book. There wells forth from the very midst of this absorption such a healthy love of nature and of life, such a hearty, revolutionary ire at conventional society, its prejudices, its compulsory regulations, its terror of genius, whose stream might possibly overflow its banks and flood the " tulip beds and kitchen-gardens," that the main impression which the work leaves on our minds is that of the impulse towards originality and poetry which it depicts, arouses, and satisfies.

What an advance we have here upon *La Nouvelle Héloïse* ! In the first place, there is a far deeper and purer feeling for nature than in Rousseau. The additional fact, that scenery is looked at from a new point of view, is to be ascribed to the influence of a literary event which occurred in 1762, and made a great impression ; namely, the publication of Ossian. The Scottish bard so melted even Napoleon's hard heart that he much preferred him to Homer.

At this time the authenticity of Ossian had not been called in question; at a later period men turned from these poems with the pique which people who have been raving about the singing of a nightingale would show if they discovered that some rascal hidden among the bushes had been imposing on them. In the hearts of his contemporaries, Macpherson succeeded in supplanting Homer. Among others he influenced Goethe, which accounts for our finding the healthy Homeric view of nature which prevails in the first half of *Werther*, superseded in the second by the Ossianic mist pictures which harmonise with the increasing morbidity, restlessness, and lyrical passion of the tale.

Rousseau's chief female figure is drawn with uncertain touch. Like most French heroines, she is wanting in womanly simplicity. In genuineness and sincerity of passion she falls far short of her namesake, the real Héloïse, whose every word comes from the heart. Julie's utterances are cold; she perpetually relapses into lectures on Virtue and the Supreme Being. She makes such observations as the following: "To such a degree are all human affairs naught, that with the exception of the being which exists by itself, there is no beauty except in that which is not." She means in our illusions. Julie dissects feelings, and reasons in high-flown language. In contrast with her how naive and natural is the vigorous Charlotte! Think of the latter, for instance, in the famous scene where she is cutting bread and butter for her little sisters and brothers. If she offends it is not by declamation, but by a touch of sentimentality, as, for instance, in the scene where her thoughts and Werther's meet, when, looking out into the rain through the wet window-pane, she utters the word: "Klopstock!"

From St. Preux to Werther the advance is equally great. In the former there was, as his name implies, some reminiscence of the ideal knight. It is Goethe, the poet of the modern era, who finally disposes of this ideal. In his heroes, physical courage, which never fails in its effect on naive readers, is almost too much ignored. It is so in the case of Wilhelm Meister and Faust. And Werther too is no knight, but a thinking and feeling microcosm. From his

limited point in space he embraces the whole of existence, and the trouble in his soul is the trouble which heralds and accompanies the birth of a new era. His most enduring mood is one of limitless longing. He belongs to an age of anticipation and inauguration, not to one of abandonment and despair. We shall see his antithesis in Chateaubriand's René. The main source of Werther's unhappiness is to be found in the disparity between the limitations of society and the infinity of the heart. In early days the heroes of literature were kings and princes; their worldly position harmonised with their spiritual greatness; the contrast between desire and power was unknown. And even after literature had widened its bounds, it still admitted only those whose birth and wealth raised them above the low toils and troubles of life. In *Wilhelm Meister* Goethe indicates the cause. "O thrice happy," he cries, "are they who are placed by birth on the heights of humanity, and who have never dwelt in, have never even travelled through, the valley of humiliation in which so many an honest soul spends a miserable life. They have scarcely entered existence before they step on board a ship to take the great common journey; they profit by every favourable breath of wind, while the others, left to their own resources, swim painfully after, deriving but small benefit from the favouring breeze, and often sink when their strength is exhausted to a miserable death beneath the waves." Here we have one of the blessings of life, namely, wealth, praised in eloquent terms, and what may be said of wealth, the lowest in order of life's outward advantages, may be said with still more reason of all the other external forms of happiness and power.

It is at the change of the century that we first come upon this strange incongruity, a personality who is a sort of god and ruler in the spiritual world, whose capacity of feeling is such that by means of it he draws into his own life the whole life of the universe, the demand of whose heart is a demand for omnipotence (for omnipotence he must have in order to transform the cold, hard world into a world after his own heart), and who, along with all this, is—what? A Secretary of Legation, perhaps, like Werther, with a few

hundred thalers a year, a man who is so needy that he is glad when the Hereditary Prince makes him a present of twenty-five ducats, who is confined half the day to his office, who is debarred from all except bourgeois society, and looks for the fulfilment of all his desires of happiness in the possession of a girl who is carried off from under his nose by a commonplace prig. Would he cultivate a talent, there are obstacles in his way; would he gratify a desire, some conventional rule restrains him; in his longing to follow his ardent impulses, to quench his burning spiritual thirst, he passionately stretches out his hands, but society peremptorily says: No. It seemed as if there were a great and terrible discord between the individual and the general condition of things, between heart and reason, between the laws of passion and those of society. The impression that this was so had taken deep hold of that generation. It appeared to them that there was something wrong with the great machinery of existence, and that it would soon collapse. Nor was it long before they heard the crash, before that time came when all barriers were broken down and all forms done away with; when the established order was overthrown and distinctions of class suddenly disappeared; when the air was filled with the smoke of gunpowder and the notes of the "Marseillaise"; when the ancient boundaries of kingdoms were changed and re-changed, kings were dethroned and beheaded, and the religion of a thousand years was abolished; when a Corsican lieutenant of artillery proclaimed himself the heir of the Revolution and declared all careers open to the man of talent, the son of a French innkeeper ascended the throne of Naples, and a quondam grenadier grasped the sceptres of Sweden and Norway.

It is the longing and the vague unrest of anticipation that distinguish Werther. A revolution lies between him and the next great type, the Frenchman, René. In René the poetry of prophecy is superseded by that of disillusionment. In place of pre-revolutionary discontent we have anti-revolutionary dissatisfaction. All those great changes had been powerless to bring man's actual condition into harmony

with the cravings of his spirit. The struggle for the human rights of the individual appeared to have resulted solely in a new tyranny. Once again we meet the young man of the age in literature. How changed he is ! The fresh colour has gone from his cheek, the ingenuousness from his mind ; his forehead is lined, his life is empty, his hand is clenched. Expelled from a society which he anathematises because he can find no place in it, he roams through a new world, through primeval forests inhabited by savage tribes. A new element, not to be found in Werther, has entered into his soul—the element of melancholy. Werther declares again and again that nothing is so obnoxious to him as ill-humour and despondency ; he is unhappy, but never melancholy. René, on the other hand, is lost in an idle grief which he is unable to control. He is heavy-hearted and misanthropical. He is a transition figure, standing midway between Goethe's Werther and Byron's Giaour and Corsair.

## IV

### RENÉ

CHATEAUBRIAND was not, like Goethe, a man of peace. A star of destruction stood above his cradle ; he was born in the same year as Napoleon, and the cruel and dark spirit of that age of the sword is apparent in his writings, and imparts to them a peculiar, wild poetry.

But, it may be objected, has he really anything at all in common with Goethe and Rousseau ? Did he actually learn anything from them ? I regard it as certain that not only he but the whole age was moulded by the books we have just criticised. A species of proof can be adduced. When Chateaubriand reproaches Byron for never mentioning his name, for ignoring all that Childe Harold owes to René, he emphasises the fact that it is not so with himself, that he will never deny the influence which Ossian, Werther, and St. Preux have exercised upon his mind. Again, describing Napoleon's Egyptian campaign, he writes : " The library he carried with him contained *Ossian*, *Werther*, *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, and the Old Testament ; sufficient indication of the chaos reigning in his brain. He mixed realistic thought with romantic feeling, systems with dreams, serious studies with fantasies, and wisdom with madness. It was out of the heterogeneous productions of this century that he fashioned the empire." <sup>1</sup> I give this pronouncement for what it is worth, but so much is clear, that if Rousseau's *Héloïse*, Goethe's *Werther*, and Ossian's poems were so much in the air that they seemed to a contemporary to be important factors in the creation of the empire, they must indubitably have had part and lot in the epoch-making literary works which appeared at the same period.

Comparing Chateaubriand's talent with the contempo-

<sup>1</sup> *Mémoires d'Outre Tombe*, ii. 190 ; iii. 78.

rary genius of Napoleon, it seems to us as if the new century had concentrated all its energy and spirit of enterprise in its great general and conqueror, leaving none to spare for the young contemporaries who did not follow him on his warlike path. The procession of men of action and warriors passes them by and leaves them standing irresolute and dissatisfied.

René is supposed to live in the days of Louis XV., but the description given of that period would apply equally well to the time of Chateaubriand's youth. It was, says René, a time when people had relapsed from the reverence for religion and the austere morality which had hitherto prevailed, into a condition of impiety and corruption, when genius had degenerated into mere nimbleness of wit, and the serious and right-minded felt ill at ease and lonely. All this applies very accurately to the close of the eighteenth century as it would be seen by Chateaubriand.

In *Atala* Chactas had told René the story of his life ; now René in return relates his past history to Chactas. He describes his childhood in the old manor-house of the remote province, he tells how ill at ease and repressed he felt in the presence of his father, and how he was only happy in the society of his sister Amélie. Brother and sister, both by nature melancholy, and both poetically inclined, are early left orphans and obliged to quit their home. René's great longing is for the peace of the cloister ; but he is changeable in his longings ; they presently take the form of a desire to travel. This desire he gratifies. He finds food for his melancholy among the ruins of Greece and Rome, and discovers as much forgetfulness of the dead among living peoples as upon the soil of past nations ; the workmen whom he questions in the streets of London know nothing of that Charles the Second at the foot of whose statue they stand. What, then, is the value of fame ? He travels to Scotland to live in the memory of the heroes of Morven, and finds herds of cattle grazing on the spots where Ossian sang and Fingal conquered. He returns to Italy and studies its monuments of art, but finds that for all his pains he has learned nothing. Past and Present are two incom-

plete statues ; the one has been dug up from the earth in a mutilated condition, the other stands unfinished, and can only be completed by the Future. Nature has as little power as history to soothe his disordered soul. He climbs Mount Etna, and, standing on its summit, sees on one side the sun rise above the horizon, with the whole of Sicily spread out far beneath, surrounded by the great sea, and looking so small that its rivers resemble the lines on a map ; on the other side he looks down into the crater of the volcano, with its burning glow and its black smoke. This situation he considers to be exactly typical of his own character and life. "All my life long," he says, "I have had a widespread and yet insignificantly small world before my eyes, and at my side a yawning abyss."

So volcanic and pretentious a nature was, naturally, out of place in the land that had given it birth. It is in vain that Chateaubriand attempts to conform in his modes of expression to the standards of that society to which he considers himself, spiritually, infinitely superior ; he is invariably treated and spoken of as an *esprit romanesque* for whom life has no use. Here we come for the first time on the term which in a slightly different form was to become so familiar in France as the denomination of a whole school. There is, undoubtedly, something of the Romanticist before the days of Romanticism in this mysterious suffering, which is so conscious of being interesting. From all these half-forgotten memories of vanished grandeur, all these impressions of the vanity of name and fame, these transports of indignation at the baseness and littleness of mankind, René has distilled an obstinate conviction that there is no such thing as happiness, and a persuasion of the weariness and emptiness of life even while he feels its healthy glow tingling in his veins. His favourite expressions are : "La folie de croire au bonheur ; dégoût de la vie ; profond sentiment d'ennui," &c.

In all this misery, the thought of his sister is his only solace, but on his return to France he notices with surprise and grief that she avoids him ; she repeatedly declares that she is unable to meet him, and has apparently forgotten all his love for her. Once only, when she divines that he is con-



templating suicide, does she draw near to him again for a moment. He has already added this coldness of his beloved sister to the list of his bitter experiences of the faithlessness of mankind, when news of her intention of entering a convent makes him hasten to her. He arrives just in time to take part in the dreary ceremony, to see Amélie's hair fall under the scissors, and to kneel by her side, while she, as the ceremony prescribes, lies prostrate like a corpse on the marble floor of the church. He hears her murmur a prayer for forgiveness for the "criminal passion she has felt for her brother," and, grasping the reason of his sister's conduct towards him, falls in a swoon. As soon as he recovers consciousness he determines to leave Europe and travel to the New World. The night he quits the French coast a terrible storm rages. "Did Heaven," he asks, "mean to warn me that tempests must always attend my steps?" One thing is certain, that to Chateaubriand René's career was as unimaginable without an accompaniment of thunder and lightning as Atala's love tale had been.

We have here an exceptional character encountering an exceptional destiny. And it is from this character that the melancholy and misanthropy of the new literature may be said to emanate. This melancholy and this misanthropy differ from any previously known. Molière's *Alceste*, for instance, the finest and most profound of his masculine characters, is only misanthropical in so far that he is troubled to the depths of his being by the meanness, the servility, the frivolous or cowardly duplicity which prevail at a corrupt and worldly court; but he is not melancholy, there is nothing morbid in his temperament, he does not bear the mark of Cain upon his brow.

The melancholy of the early nineteenth century partakes of the nature of a disease; and it is not a disease which attacks a single individual or a single nation only, it is an epidemic which spreads from people to people, in the manner of those religious manias which so often spread over Europe in the Middle Ages. René's is merely the first and most marked case of the disease in the form in which it attacked the most gifted intellects.

René bears that mark of Cain already alluded to, which is, withal, the mark of the ruler. The seal of genius, invisible to himself, has been set on his brow. Behind the mournful self-accusations of which his confession consists, lies the proud feeling of superiority which filled the writer's breast. If we read Chateaubriand's *Mémoires* attentively, we cannot resist the impression that the fiction of Amélie's love for René veils a kind of confession, an admission of the passionate love his sister Lucile cherished for her remarkable brother. How much in the way of confession may not the remainder of the book contain?

René's sufferings are the birth-throes of genius in the modern soul. He is the moment in which the chosen spirit, like the Hebrew prophet of old, hears the voice that calls him, and timidly draws back, shrinking despairingly from the task, and saying: "Choose not me, O Lord; choose another, my brother; I am too weak, too slow of speech." René is this first stage, the stage of unrest, of election. The chosen waits to see another follow the call; he looks around but sees none arise, and the voice continues to call. He sees all that he loathes and scorns triumph, and all that worsted for which he would so willingly sacrifice everything if another would but lead the way. With amazement and dread he realises that there is not one who feels as he does; he wanders about seeking a leader and finding none, until at last the certainty is borne in upon him that, as none appears, as he can discover no helper, no guide, it must be because it is he himself who is destined to be the guide and support of weaker souls. At last he follows the call; he sees that the time for dreaming and doubting is past, that the time to act has come. The crisis leaves him, not, like Werther, prepared to commit suicide, but with a firm resolve and a higher opinion of himself. Genius, however, is always a curse as well as a blessing. Even the greatest and most harmoniously constituted natures have, all their lives, been aware of the curse it carries with it. In René, Chateaubriand has shown us the curse alone. His own nature and the position in which he stood to the ideas of his time caused genius, as *he* knew it, to seem merely a source of

lonely suffering, or of wild, egotistical pleasure, marred by the feeling of its emptiness and worthlessness.

Chateaubriand, the inaugurator of the religious reaction of the nineteenth century, himself possessed no faith, no enthusiasm, no real devotion to an idea. The ideas of the eighteenth century were beginning to suffer an eclipse, to look like fallacies; the great ideas of the nineteenth had not as yet taken scientific shape, and, placed and constituted as he was, Chateaubriand was incapable of anticipating them. Hence he became the leader of the reaction, the champion of Catholicism and the Bourbons. With the genius's instinctive inclination to seize on the great principle of the new age, but without the genius's infallible prevision of its real nature and faith in its final victory, he took hold of the ideas which a temporary revulsion in men's mood and sympathies had brought to light, and championed them with obstinacy, with magnificent but often hollow eloquence, with great talent but without warmth, without that conviction which permeates the whole individual and makes of him the enthusiastic, indefatigable organ of the idea. Whilst Voltaire, with all his restlessness and all his faults, sustained his life's battle freshly, unweariedly, and invincibly to the last, because he never for a moment wavered in his faith in his ideals, Chateaubriand was consumed by ennui, incredulity, and cynicism. In one direction only, namely as a poet, and more especially a colourist, did he break new ground; and hence it was only his youthful poetical efforts that satisfied and inwardly rewarded him. But of all his creations, *René*, the picture of the intellectual type to which he himself belonged, was the most successful.

A genius of *René's* type may employ religious phraseology, but he never truly merges himself in a higher being; his melancholy in its inmost essence is only the egoist's unsatisfied craving for enjoyment. As a genius *René* knows that the Deity is with and within him, and he can scarcely distinguish between himself and the Deity. He feels that his thought and his words are inspired, and where is the boundary between that which is of him and that which is not of him? He demands everything—the homage of the

public, the love of women, all the laurels and roses of life—and it never occurs to him that he is in duty bound to make any return. He accepts love without loving again. Is not his a privileged nature? is not he a prophet hastening through life like a fugitive, a fleeting fire which illuminates, consumes, and vanishes?

In these traits the author has simply described his own nature. Chateaubriand's *Mémoires* contain, especially in their silences, sufficient witness to the studied coldness with which he accepted love and admiration. Some of his private letters to which Sainte-Beuve had access show with what icy egotism he at times attempted to enslave with promises of a consuming passion. Even at the age of sixty-four he wrote to a young lady from whom he was soliciting a rendezvous in Switzerland: "My life is merely an incident; of that incident take the passion, the perturbation and the suffering; I shall give you more of these in one day than others in long years." One looks back and remembers the touching tenderness shown by Voltaire to his Émilie even after he knew that he was being grossly deceived by her, and the so-called Lucifer of the last century seems as innocent as a child in comparison.

The picture of René was not finished in the book which bears his name; he plays an important part in *Les Natchez*, a romance written about the same time, but published later. His behaviour in it completes the portrayal of the character. Conforming to Indian custom, he takes to himself a wife, Celuta, who is passionately devoted to him. But it goes without saying that life with her does not heal the wounds of his heart. "René," we read, "had longed for an uninhabited country, a wife, and liberty; he had got what he longed for, but something marred his enjoyment of it. He would have blessed the hand that at one blow freed him from his past suffering and present felicity, if felicity indeed it were. He tried to realise his old dreams. What woman could be more beautiful than Celuta? He carried her into the heart of the forest, and strove to strengthen the impression of his freedom by exchanging one lonely dwelling-place for another, but whether he pressed his young wife to his

heart in the depths of the forest or high on the mountain-top, he did not experience the happiness he had hoped for. The vacuum that had formed deep down in his soul could not be filled. A divine judgment had fallen upon René—which is the explanation both of his suffering and his genius. He troubled by his presence ; passion emanated from him but could not enter into him ; he weighed heavy on the earth over which he impatiently wandered, and which bore him against his will." Such is the author's description of René as the married man.

These experiments of the hero with his young bride, these attempts to enhance the attraction of her love by the added zest of peculiar natural surroundings, are extremely characteristic. But it is all in vain ! The unnatural passion he had once inspired, and to which the very fact of its being unnatural, and, according to human laws, criminal, communicated a strength and a fire which harmonised with the fiery strength of his own nature, has half infected him, has, in any case, made it impossible for him to love again. In his very remarkable farewell letter to Celuta he says that it is this misfortune which has made him what he is ; he has been loved, too deeply loved, and that mysterious passion has sealed the fountains of his being although it has not dried them up. "All love," he says, "became a horror to me. I had the image of a woman before my eyes whom none could approach. Although consumed by passion in my inmost soul, I have been in some inexplicable fashion frozen by the hand of misfortune. . . ." "There are," he continues, "some existences so miserable that they seem an accusation against Providence, and should surely cure any one of the mania for life."

Even the innate desire to live, the deeply-rooted natural love of life itself, is scorned by him half affectedly, half weariedly, as a *mania*, and is supplanted by a wild Satanic lust of destruction. "I take it," he continues to Celuta, "that René's heart now lies open before you. Do you see what a strange world it is ? Flames issue from it, which lack nourishment, and which could consume creation without being satiated, yea, could even consume thee !"

In the next breath he is religious again, humble again, trembling at God's wrath. In the solitude he hears the Almighty cry to him as to Cain : "René! René! what hast thou done with thy sister?" The one wrong which he accuses himself of having done to Celuta is, that he has united her destiny with his. The deepest sorrow this connection has caused him lies in the fact that Celuta has made him a father ; it is with a species of horror that he sees his life thus extended beyond its limits. He bids Celuta burn his papers, burn the hut built by him in which they have lived, and return home to her brother. He wishes to leave no traces of his existence upon earth. It is evident that he would fain also require her, after the manner of Indian widows, to lay herself upon his funeral pile ; for the same species of jealousy inspires him which prompted many a mediæval knight to kill his favourite horse. This last letter to his wife ends with the following characteristic farewell :—

"If I die, Celuta, you may after my death unite yourself with a more tranquil soul than mine. But do not believe that you can accept with impunity the caresses of another man, or that weaker embraces can efface those of René from your soul. I have pressed you to my heart in the midst of the desert and in the hurricane ; the day when I bore you across the stream, it was in my mind to plunge my dagger into your heart in order to secure that heart's happiness, and to punish myself for having given you this happiness. It is thou, O supreme Being, the source of love and happiness, it is thou alone who hast made me what I am, and only thou canst understand me! Oh, why did I not fling myself into the foaming waters of the torrent! I should then have returned to the bosom of nature with all my energies unimpaired.

"Yes, Celuta, if you lose me you will remain a widow. Who else could surround you with the flame which radiates from me even when I do not love? The lonely spots to which I imparted the warmth of love, would seem icy cold to you by the side of another mate. What would you seek in the shades of the forest? For you there is no rapture, no

intoxication, no delirium left. I robbed you of all this in giving you it all, or rather in giving nothing, for an incurable wound burned in my inmost soul. . . . I am weary of life, a weariness which has always consumed me. I am left untouched by all that interests other men. If I had been a shepherd or a king, what should I have done with my shepherd's crook or my crown? Glory and genius, work and leisure, prosperity and adversity, would weary me alike. I have found society and nature irksome in Europe as in America. I take no pleasure in my virtue, and should feel no remorse were I a criminal. I would that I had never been born, or that I were eternally forgotten."<sup>1</sup>

Thus powerfully was the dissonance first sounded which was afterwards repeated with so many variations by the authors of the "Satanic" school. Not satisfied with depicting, with a sure hand and in the grand style, a self-idolatry bordering upon insanity, Chateaubriand throws it into relief on the dark background of a sister's guilty passion. So impelled is he to make René irresistibly seductive, that he does not rest until he has inspired his own sister with an unnatural love for him. This criminal attachment between brother and sister was a subject which occupied men's minds considerably at that time. Not many years previously, Goethe, in his *Wilhelm Meister*, had made Mignon the fruit of a sinister union between brother and sister; and both Shelley and Byron treated the same subject in *Rosalind and Helen*, *The Revolt of Islam*, *Cain*, and *Manfred*. It was a favourite theory with the young revolutionary school that the horror of incest between brother and sister was merely based upon prejudice.

But René's melancholy is too innate and profound to be caused by Amélie's unhappy passion alone. The reader feels all the time that this passion only provides an occasion for the outburst of the melancholy. René's despondency, his egotism, his outward coldness and suppressed inward fire, are to be found independently of this external cause in many of the gifted authors of that period, and in a number of

<sup>1</sup> *Les Natchez*. Chateaubriand, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. v. pp. 353-463. In his *Mémoires* the author has, in expressing his own sentiments, unconsciously repeated one of these sentences. It has already been quoted.

their best-known characters—Tieck's *William Lovell*, Frederick Schlegel's *Julius*, Byron's *Corsair*, Kierkegaard's *Johannes Forførelsen*, and Lermontov's *Hero of our Own Time*. They constitute the European hall-mark with which the heroes of literature are stamped in the early years of the nineteenth century.

But what marks *René* as being more especially a product of the nascent reaction is the aim of the story—an aim which it has in common with only one of the above-mentioned works, Kierkegaard's *Johannes Forførelsen*. Forming part of a greater whole which has a distinctly moral and religious tendency, it professes to be written for the express purpose of warning against the mental condition it portrays, of showing the glory and the indispensability of Christianity as a refuge for the disordered soul, and more particularly of proving by means of Amélie's example that the re-establishment of convents is imperative, because salvation from certain errors is only to be found in the cloister. The pious intention of the book and its very profane matter conflict in a manner which is not particularly edifying. But this too is a typical trait of the reaction; we find it again, for instance, in the first parts of Kierkegaard's *Enten-Eller* and *Stadier*. The prevailing tone is a wild longing of genius for enjoyment, which satisfies itself by mingling the idea of death and destruction, a sort of Satanic frenzy, with what would otherwise be mild and natural feelings of enjoyment and happiness. It avails little that this work, like *Atala*, has an avowedly Catholic, even clerical, tendency; its undercurrent is anything but Christian, is not even religious.

But this undercurrent, however impure and diluted it may be in the individual writer, springs from a spiritual condition which is the result of the great revolution in men's minds. All the spiritual maladies which make their appearance at this time may be regarded as products of two great events—the emancipation of the individual, and the emancipation of thought.

The individual has been emancipated. No longer satisfied with the place assigned to him, no longer content to follow the plough across his father's field, the young man released from serfdom, freed from villenage, for the first



time sees the whole world lie open before him. Everything seems to have become suddenly possible ; the word *impossible* has lost its meaning now that the drumstick in the soldier's hand may, by a series of rapid changes, turn into a marshal's baton or even a sceptre. The powers of the individual, however, have not kept pace with his possibilities ; of the hundred thousand to whom the road is suddenly thrown open, only one can reach the desired goal, and who is to assure the individual that he is that one ? Inordinate desire is necessarily accompanied by inordinate melancholy. Nor is it every one, without exception, that can take part in the great wild race. Those who for some reason or other feel themselves bound up with the old order of things, and the finer, less thick-skinned natures, the men who are rather dreamers than workers, find that they are excluded ; they stand aside or emigrate, they are thrown back upon themselves, and their self-communings increase their self-centredness and thereby augment their capacity for suffering. It is the most highly developed organisms which suffer most.

Add to this, that the collapse of the old order releases the individual from a wholesome pressure which has kept him within certain social bounds and prevented his thinking himself of too much importance. Now self-idolatry is possible, wherever the power of self-restraint is not as strong as the control formerly exercised by society. And at the same time that everything has become possible, it seems as if everything had become permissible. All the power which the individual had given up, had voluntarily transferred to his God or his king, he now reclaims. Just as he no longer raises his hat to the gilded chariot for whose gilding he himself has paid, so he no longer bows to any prohibition whose human origin he can plainly discern. To all such he has an answer ready, an answer which is a question, a terrible question, one that is the beginning of all human knowledge and all human freedom, the question "Why ?" It is plain that even these aberrations of fancy upon which we have just dwelt, these excursions into the domain of unnatural passions and unnatural crimes, are only a symptom ; they

are one of the mistakes made in the great, momentous struggle of the individual to assert himself.

Thought has been emancipated. The individual, released from tutelage, no longer feels himself part of a whole ; he feels himself to be a little world which reflects, on a diminished scale, the whole of the great world. So many individuals, so many mirrors, in each of which the universe is reflected. But though thought has gradually acquired courage to understand, not fragmentarily, but in this universally comprehensive manner, its capacity has not grown along with its courage ; humanity stumbles on in the dark as before. To the old questions, Why is man born ? Why does he live ? To what end does it all lead ? the answer, as far as it can be made out, seems unsatisfying, discouraging, a pessimistic answer. In times gone by men had been born into a distinct, unquestioned creed, which provided them with answers believed to have been supernaturally communicated, full of comfort and promise. In the eighteenth century, this creed having been abandoned, they were born into an almost equally dogmatic, at any rate equally inspiring, belief in the saving power of civilisation and enlightenment ; they lived on the promises of the happiness and harmony which should spread over the earth when the doctrines of their philosophers were universally accepted. In the beginning of the nineteenth century this ground of confidence also was undermined. History seemed to teach that this path also led nowhere, and the confusion in men's minds was like the confusion of an army which receives contradictory orders in the midst of a battle. The standpoint even of those who try to turn thought back into the old religious grooves is not the standpoint of the old religion, for they themselves were but a few years ago either Voltaireans or adherents of Rousseau's deism ; their new piety has been painfully reasoned out and struggled for. This explains the cribbed, constrained character of the intellectual movement among the writers who usher in the new century. In a very striking image Alfred de Musset has expressed the impression they produce. "Eternity," he says, "is like an eyrie from which the cen-

turies fly forth like young eaglets to skim through the universe each in his turn. Now it is our century which has come to the edge of the nest. It stands there glaring, but its wings have been clipped, and it awaits its death gazing into the infinite space out into which it is incapable of flying."

## V

### OBERMANN

A STRIKING contrast to René, egotistical and imperious as he is despite his weariness of life, is presented by the next remarkable variant of the type of the age.

*Obermann*, a work produced in the same year as *René*, was also written in exile. Its author, Étienne Pierre de Sénancour, was born in Paris in 1770, but emigrated in the early days of the Revolution to Switzerland, where a long illness and various other circumstances compelled him to remain. In his quality of *émigré* he was banished from France, and could only now and again venture secretly over its frontiers to visit his mother. Under the Consulate he returned to Paris without permission, and for the first three years lived the life of an absolute hermit in order not to attract the attention of the authorities. He afterwards gained a scanty livelihood by writing for Liberal newspapers and editing historical hand-books. His was a lonely, quiet life—the life of a deeply-feeling stoic.

Sénancour's first work, the title of which, *Meditations on the Original Nature of Man*, proclaims the pupil of Rousseau, appeared in 1799. His psychological romance, *Obermann*, was published early in 1804. This book created no particular stir on its first appearance, but at a later period it passed through many editions; successive generations perused its pages, and in France it was long classed with *Werther* and *Ossian*. It was studied by Nodier and Balanche, and was Sainte-Beuve's favourite work, he and George Sand doing much to bring it into public notice.

*Obermann* in France, like *Werther* in Germany, has been in the hands of many a suicide; it was constantly

read by Victor Hugo's unhappy friend, Rabbe, known to the public through Hugo's life and poems, and a certain clique of young men, Bastide, Sautelet (who committed suicide), Ampère, Stapfer, made a regular cult of the book. As René is the elect, Obermann is the passed by. Some of the ruling spirits of the century recognised themselves in René, Obermann was understood and appreciated by highly-gifted, deeply-agitated spirits of the finest temper. The book begins as follows: "In these letters are to be found the utterances of a spirit that feels, not of a spirit that acts." Here we have the kernel of the matter. Why does he not act? Because he is unhappy. Why is he unhappy? Because he is too sensitive, too impressionable. He is all heart, and the heart does not work.

It was the age of rule, discipline, military despotism, the age in which mathematics was the most esteemed of all the sciences, and energy, accompanied by a capacity for unqualified submission, the most esteemed of all the virtues. By no single fibre of his being does Obermann belong to this period; he abhors both discipline and mathematics as heartily as could any future Romanticist. He despises the Philistines who take the same walk every day, turning daily at the same place. He does not wish to know beforehand how his feelings will be affected. "Let the mind," he says, "strive to give a certain symmetry to its productions; the heart does not work, and can only produce when we exempt it from the labour of fashioning." We feel that this unreasonable principle is applied in his letters, which form a heavy, diffuse, serious, badly written book; they produce the effect of improvisations, to which the author, regarding them as the children of his heart, has not chosen or else not been able to impart an attractive form. It is true that nuggets of gold are hidden in the ponderous ore, but they must be laboriously sought for; a man with real literary talent would have gilded the whole mass with them.

The hero of the book is one of those unhappy souls who seem created for the shady side of life and never succeed in getting out into its sunshine. There is, as Hamlet says, along with many excellent qualities some "one defect" in



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their nature which prevents the harmonious interplay of its parts. In the delicately balanced works of a watch some little spring, some little wheel breaks, and the whole mechanism comes to a standstill. Obermann has no settled occupation, no sphere of activity, no profession ; it is only in the last pages of the book that he makes up his mind that he will be an author ; the reader feels no assurance, however, that success awaits him upon this path. The author who has been successful with ever so small a work sees, on looking back, what an almost incredible variety of circumstances have favoured him, what an extraordinary number of obstacles, great and small, have had to be overcome ; he remembers how carefully he had to watch his time, how eagerly to seize the opportune moment, how often he was on the point of giving it all up, how many paroxysms of despair he lived through, all to attain this paltry end. The most insignificant book which is born alive speaks of ten thousand triumphs. And what a combination of favourable circumstances is demanded to prevent its dying immediately after birth ! As many as in the case of a living organism. The book must find some unoccupied space into which it fits, the interest awakened by it must not be interfered with by other, stronger, interests, or the talent displayed in it outshone by greater talent. It must not recall any previous work, must not even accidentally resemble anything else, and yet must, in one way or other, be associated with something already familiar, must follow a path already struck out. It is of special importance that it should appear at the right moment. There are works which are not actually weak, but which appear so in the light of some contemporaneous event or in comparison with some contemporaneous production ; they are made to seem old-fashioned, poor, pale, as it were.

It is probable that Obermann, as an author, will belong to the same class of writers as his creator, Sénancour, namely those who believe that there is something of a magical nature in the secret of success.

His letters provide us with full particulars of his spiritual life and history. The latter is epitomised in the following words: "Oh ! how great one is, so long as one is inexperienced !



how rich and productive one would be if only the cold looks of one's neighbours and the chill blast of injustice did not shrivel up one's heart! I needed happiness; I was created to suffer. Who does not know those dark days towards the coming of winter, when even the morning brings dense mists and the only light is in some burning bars of colour in the clouded sky? Think of those veils of mist, that wan light, those hurricane gusts whistling among bending, trembling trees, that steady howl, interrupted by terrific shrieks; such was the morning of my life. At midday the colder, steadier storms; towards evening gathering darkness; and man's day is at an end."

To so morose a temperament a regularly ordered life is insupportable. The most difficult, distressing moment in a young man's life, that in which he must choose a profession, is one which Obermann cannot face. For to choose a calling means to exchange complete liberty and the full privileges of humanity for confinement resembling that of the beast in its stall. It is to their freedom from the stamp of any calling that women owe part of their beauty and of the poetry of their sex. The stamp of a calling is a restraint, a limitation, a ridiculous thing. How then could a man with a nature like Obermann's possibly choose a profession? At once too intense and too weak for real life, he hates nothing more than dependence! The whole constitution of society is repellent to him: "Thus much is certain; I will not drag myself up step by step, take a place in society, be compelled to show respect to superiors in return for the privilege of despising inferiors. Nothing is so imbecile as these degrees of contempt reaching down through society from the prince, who claims to be inferior to God alone, to the poorest rag-picker who must be servile to the woman from whom he hires a straw mattress for the night."

He will not purchase the right to command at the price of obedience. To him a clock represents the quintessence of torture. To bind himself to tear his mood into fragments when the clock strikes, as the labourer, the man of business, and the official must, is to him to deprive

himself of the one good thing which life with all its tribulations offers, namely, independence.

He is a stranger among his fellow-men ; they do not feel as he feels, he does not believe what they believe. They appear to him so tainted with superstition, prejudices, hypocrisy, and social untruthfulness, that he shrinks from contact with them. At the close of the eighteenth century France was not orthodox, but it had not emancipated itself from the belief in God and in a future existence. Obermann does not share these beliefs ; his is an essentially modern spirit ; his philosophy is the scientific philosophy of the nineteenth century ; he is a warm, convinced humanitarian, and has as little belief in a happier existence after death as in a personal God.

The question of religion is discussed from various points of view in his letters. We already find the indignant refutation of the theory that atheism is the result of wickedness. They who believe in the Bible, says Obermann, maintain that it is only men's evil passions which prevent them from being Christians ; the atheist might with equal justice assert that only the bad man is a Christian, since it is only the Christian who requires the help of phantasms to restrain him from stealing, lying, and murdering, and who endorses the theory that it would not be worth while leading an upright life if there were no hell. He attempts to explain the psychical origin of the belief in the immortality of the individual. The majority of human beings, restless and unhappy, live in hope that next hour, that to-morrow, and, finally, that in a life to come, they may attain the happiness they desire. To the argument that this belief is, at any rate, a consolation, he replies, that its being a consolation to the unhappy, is but one reason the more for doubting its truth. Men so readily credit what they wish to believe. Suppose one of the old sophists to have succeeded in making a pupil believe that by following certain directions for ten days he would be assured of invulnerability, eternal youth, &c.—the belief would doubtless be very agreeable to the pupil in question, but none the better founded for that. When asked what becomes of motion, mind, and soul, which are incorruptible, Obermann

replies : " When the fire on your hearth goes out, its light, its warmth, its force forsake it, and it passes into another world, where it will be eternally rewarded if it has warmed your feet and eternally punished if it has burned your slippers."

He also attacks the theory, as often urged in our own as in those days, that those who do not believe in the dogmas of religion should hold their peace and not deprive others of the mainstay of their lives. He argues warmly, passionately, asserting that the cultivated classes and the town populations no longer believe in dogma (we must remember that he is writing of 1801-2), and as regards the lower classes, putting the matter thus : Even if we take for granted that it is both impossible and inadvisable to cure the masses of their delusions, does this justify deceit, does this make it a crime to speak the truth, or an evil that truth should be told ? As a matter of fact, however, the masses now universally display a desire to learn the truth ; it is clear that faith is everywhere undermined ; and our first endeavour ought to be to prove clearly to all and sundry that the obligation to do right is quite independent of the belief in a future life.

Obermann, then, maintains that the laws of morality are natural, not supernatural, and are consequently unaffected by the collapse of belief. He repeatedly emphasises the disastrous practical results of silence in matters of religion ; it is the system of silence which makes it possible for the education of woman to be still carried on upon the old lines, keeping her, as a rule, in a state of ignorance that makes her the enemy of progress, and too often delivers her, body and soul, into the power of her father confessor. A comparison between love as a happiness-producing power and love in the rôle it plays in marriage, leads him on to express some very strong opinions regarding the then prevailing ideas on the relations between the sexes, and the principles according to which a woman's conduct is judged in civilised society.

On these points Obermann is quite modern—he here follows the line of thought indicated by the preceding century ; but in all that regards the emotions he is less modern, although he heralds something new, something that is on the

way, namely Romanticism. He reflects much on the subject of the romantic ; a portion of his book bears the significant title, "De l'expression romantique et du Ranz des Vaches." He defines the idea much as contemporary German writers do, although he does not systematise to the same extent. He declares the romantic conception of things to be the only one that harmonises with profound, true feeling : In all wild countries like Switzerland nature is full of romance, but romance vanishes when the hand of man is discernible everywhere ; romantic effects resemble isolated words of man's original speech, which is not remembered by all, &c., &c. ; nature is more romantic in her sounds than in her sights ; the ear is more romantically impressionable than the eye ; the voice of the woman we love affects us more romantically than her features, the Alpine horn expresses the romance of the Alps more forcibly than any painting ; for we admire what we see, but we feel what we hear.

It is interesting to note how Obermann unconsciously takes up the tone of the German Romanticists whom he has never read. They also exalt music as the art of arts. Sénancour declares elsewhere that he cares almost more for the songs whose words he does not understand than for those of which he can follow the words as well as the melody. He remarks this *à propos* of the German songs he hears in Switzerland, naïvely adding : "Besides, there is something more romantic about the German accent." It is remarkable that we should find already suggested in Sénancour even that conception of language as simply musical sound which was subsequently characteristic of the German Romantic School. But his senses are too highly developed for him to rest content with music as the best means of intercourse between man and nature. In two separate passages in his book he declares that a succession of different fragrances contains as rich a melody as any succession of tones, and can, like music, call up pictures of far-away places and things.<sup>1</sup> Among the late French Romanticists we do not find such another highly developed, ultra-refined sense of smell until we come to Baudelaire. But whereas in Baudelaire it is a

<sup>1</sup> Obermann, 1833, vol. i. p. 262 ; vol. ii. p. 90.

symptom of over-developed sensuousness, in Sénancour it is only an indication of the purely romantic cult of the Ego ; it is one element in an emotional revel, for Sénancour believes that by means of the sense of smell as well as by means of the sense of hearing he can distinguish the hidden harmonies of existence. It also implies a shrinking from reality, with the corresponding intensified self-centredness ; for it is only a volatilised essence of things that one inhales through the medium of perfumes and tones.

In his repugnance for realities, no solitude is too complete for Obermann. He lives alone, avoiding both cities and villages. There is in him the strangest mixture of love for mankind in general and complete indifference in all the relations of real life. So sensitive is he, that he is afflicted by scruples about his addiction to the mild dissipation of tea-drinking (tea being very characteristically his favourite beverage). He finds that it distracts his melancholy (*le thé est d'un grand secours pour s'ennuyer d'une manière calme*), but he despises all external excitement and stimulant. He is aware that he is far from being French in this respect, for, he aptly remarks, if Frenchmen inhabited Naples, they would build a ball-room in the crater of Vesuvius. He does not truly live except when he is entirely alone, in mist-veiled forests which recall the inevitable Ossian, or at night by the silent shores of a Swiss lake. Like his contemporary Novalis, he feels that darkness, by veiling visible nature, forces man's Ego back into itself.

Speaking of a night he passed alone with nature, he says : " In that one night I experienced all that mortal heart can know of unutterable longing, unutterable woe. In it I consumed ten years of my life." And he attains to an even more profound self-consciousness by day, in the snow-fields of the Alps, where all surrounding life is not only veiled, as by night, but is frozen and apparently at a standstill.

He is most himself when he climbs from the Swiss valley in which he lives up to the desolate wilds of the highest mountains. With an indescribable, almost boyish gladness, he watches the form of his guide disappearing in the distance ; revelling in loneliness, he becomes oblivious of time

and humanity. Note him in these surroundings: "The day was hot, the horizon misty, and the valleys full of vapour. The lower atmosphere was lighted up by bright reflections from the glaciers, but absolute purity seemed the essential quality of the air I breathed. At this height no exhalation from the lower regions, no earthly light, troubled the dark, infinite depths of the sky. It had no longer the pale, clear, soft blue colour of the vault we look up to from the plains; no, the ether permitted the sight to lose itself in boundless infinity, and, heedless of the glare of sun and glacier, to seek other worlds and other suns as it does by night. Imperceptibly, the vapours of the glaciers rose and formed clouds under my feet. My eyes were no longer wearied by the sparkle of the snow, and the heavens grew darker and deeper still. The snowy dome of Mont Blanc lifted its immovable mass above the moving grey sea of piled-up mist which the wind raised into enormous billows. A black speck showed far down in their abysses; swiftly rising, it advanced directly towards me. It was a great Alpine eagle; its wings were wet and its eyes were fierce; it was seeking prey. But at the sight of a human being it uttered a sinister cry, precipitated itself into the mist and disappeared. This cry was echoed twenty times, but the echoes were dry sounds, without resonance, like so many isolated cries in the universal silence. Then all sank back into absolute stillness, as though sound itself had ceased to exist, as though the reverberating property of bodies had been universally suspended. Silence is unknown in the noisy valleys, it is only on these cold heights that this immobility reigns, this perpetual solemnity which no tongue can express, no imagination conjure up. Were it not for the memories he brings from the plains, man would believe up here that, leaving himself out of the question, movement did not exist; the motion of the stars would be inexplicable to him, even the mists seem to remain the same despite their changes. He knows that the moments follow each other, but he does not feel it. Everything seems to be eternally petrified. I could wish I had preserved a more exact remembrance of my sensations in those silent regions. In the midst of every-

day life the imagination is hardly capable of recalling a sequence of ideas which present surroundings seem to contradict and thrust aside. But in such moments of energy one is not in a condition to think of the future or of other men and take notes for it and them, or to dwell upon the fame to be acquired by one's thoughts, or even to take thought of the common good. One is more natural; one is not bent on making use of the present moment, one does not control one's ideas, nor require one's mind to examine into things, discover hidden secrets, or find something to say which has never been said before. Thought is no longer active and regulated, but passive and free. One dreams, one abandons one's self, one is profound without *esprit*, great without enthusiasm, energetic without will."

We can see him, this pupil of Jean Jacques, who has energy without will (exactly Obermann's case), sitting solitary amidst Jean Jacques's scenery. *René* had widened the range of literary landscape. Instead of the Swiss lake and the woods and groves with which we began in *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, *René* and *Atala* gave us the great primeval forest, the gigantic Mississippi and its tributaries, and all the glowing, dazzling colour and fragrant, intoxicating luxuriance of tropical nature. This was a fitting natural background for a figure like *René*'s. The exiled Chateaubriand had wandered through such scenery, and it had left its imprint on him. Obermann is in his proper place in the desert silence and dumbness of the mountains.

It is where there is no life, where life loses its hold, that he feels at home. Will he be able to endure life? Or will he, like Werther, some day cast it from him?

He does not do so. He finds strength in a great resolve. He gives up once and for all the idea of pleasure and happiness. "Let us," he says, "look upon all that passes and perishes as of no importance; let us choose a better part in the great drama of the world. It is from our determined resolution alone that we can hope for any enduring result." His determination to live, not to lay violent hands upon himself, is not engendered by humility but by a spirit of haughty defiance. "It may be," he says,

**"that man is created only to perish. If so, let us perish resisting, and if annihilation is our portion, let us at least do nothing to justify our fate."**

But it is long before Obermann attains to this calm. Many and impassioned are his arguments in justification of suicide ; and this is not surprising, for the suicide-epidemic in literature is one of those symptoms of the emancipation of the individual to which I have already referred. It is one form, the most radical and definite, of the individual's rejection of and release from the whole social order into which he was born. And what respect for human life were men likely to have in the days when Napoleon yearly made a blood-offering of many thousands to his ambition ? "I hear every one declare," says Obermann, "that it is a crime to put an end to one's life, but the same sophists who forbid me death, expose me to it, send me to it. It is honourable to give up life when we cling to it, it is right to kill a man who desires to live, but that same death which it is an obligation to seek when dreaded, it is criminal to seek when desired ! Under a thousand pretexts, now sophistical, now ridiculous, you play with my existence, and I alone have no rights over myself ! When I love life, I am to despise it ; when I am happy, you send me to die ; and when I wish to die, you forbid me, and burden me with a life that I loathe."

"If I ought not to take my life, neither ought I to expose myself to probable death. All your heroes are simply criminals. The command you give them does not justify them. You have no right to send them to death if they had no right to give their consent to your order. If I have no right of decision in the matter of my own death, who has given this right to society ? Have I given what I did not possess ? What insane social principle is this you have invented, which declares that I have made over to society, for the purpose of my own oppression, a right I did not possess to escape from oppression."

Once, many years ago, in an essay on the tragedy of fate, I put similar words into the mouth of a suicide : "He who groans under the burden of existence may reasonably turn and



accuse destiny, saying, 'Why was I born? Why are we not consulted? If I had been asked and had known what it was to live, I would never have consented.' We are like men who have been pressed as sailors and forced on board a ship: such sailors do not consider themselves obliged to stay on the ship if they see an opportunity of deserting. If it is argued that, having enjoyed the good of life I am bound to accept the evil, I reply: 'The good of life, the happiness of childhood, for example, which I enjoyed and my acceptance of which you say implied my consent to live, I accepted in absolute ignorance of the fact that it was earnest-money, therefore I am not bound by such earnest-money. I will not violate the ship's discipline, will not murder my comrades or anything of that sort; I will only take the one thing I have a right to, my liberty; for I never bound myself to remain.'"

This is obviously not the place to discourse at length on the permissibility of suicide. I leave that task to the moralists, only remarking that, although I do not believe anything reasonable can be urged against its permissibility except our obligations to our fellow-men, I consider these obligations in numberless cases an entirely sufficient and conclusive argument. At present I am only depicting from a purely historical point of view an actual psychical condition which is one of the phenomena of the literature under consideration. For *Werther* and *Obermann* are not the only books of this period in which suicide is represented or discussed. Atala kills herself. René is only prevented from doing so by his sister Amélie, and at one time, with a contempt of life almost as great as Schopenhauer's, he sneers at the love of life as a "mania." Their attitude towards suicide, then, forms a point of resemblance between two such different writers as Chateaubriand and Sénancour, and stamps their work with the impress of the period.

The author of *Obermann* made his hero in his own image, which perhaps explains why he makes him finally resolve to be an author. "What chance have I of success?" says Obermann. "If to say something true and to endeavour to say it convincingly be not enough, it is certain that I shall

not succeed. Take the first place, ye who desire the fame of the moment, the admiration of society, ye who are rich in ideas which last a day, in books which serve a party, in effective tricks and mannerisms! Take the first place, seducers and seduced; it is nothing to me; ye will soon be forgotten, so it is well that ye should have your day. For my own part, I do not consider it necessary to be appreciated in one's lifetime, unless one is condemned to the misfortune of having to live by one's pen."

In these words Sénancour expressed his own literary faith and predicted his own destiny. His own generation overlooked him; he was not appreciated while he lived, although he was in the unhappy position of possessing no source of income but his pen. But in the days of the Romantic School he attained renown; the Romantic critics bound his simple field flowers into garlands along with the passion-flowers and roses of Chateaubriand and Madame de Staël. And he deserved the fame he attained. For he is one of the most remarkable authors of the Emigrant Literature—a worshipper of Nature, as becomes a pupil of Rousseau, melancholy, as befits a genuine admirer of Ossian, weary of life, as befits a contemporary of Chateaubriand. He is thoroughly modern in his theories on religion, morality, education, and the position of women in society; he is the regular German Romanticist in his sentimentality, his indolence, and his dread of contact with reality, as if it were something that would burn him; and he is the French Romanticist in his mixture of liberal-mindedness with excessive scrupulosity and of enthusiasm with refined sensuousness, a combination which reappears in French literature twenty years later in Sainte-Beuve's *Joseph Delorme*. Everything stamps him as a herald or forerunner of the long train of greater intellects who at this moment begin their progress through the century; his weak voice announces them and he prepares their way.

## VI

### NODIER

SIMULTANEOUSLY with *Obermann* there appeared in the French book market a little romance which was a product of intellectual tendencies akin to those of Sénancour. Though its author too is a forerunner of greater men than himself, his remarkable and versatile talent, his sense of the fantastic (exceptionally strong for a French author), and his courage in striking out new paths, make of him not a mere precursor but a pioneer. This writer was Charles Nodier, and the name of his book, *Le Peintre de Salzbourg*.

Charles Nodier, who belongs only by virtue of a couple of early works to the period with which we are dealing, and who, except for these, must be classed as a French Romanticist prior to the existence of the French Romantic School, was born at Besançon in 1780. His father was a magistrate, a gifted and honourable man, severe in his public capacity and amiable in his home; he was a declared adherent of the eighteenth-century philosophy, and educated his son according to the principles laid down in Rousseau's *Émile*. Charles early showed an astonishing aptitude for learning, and much talent in various directions. At seventeen years of age he was so capable a philologist as to have compiled a dictionary of French onomatopœic words, a work which the Minister of Education considered worthy of a place in the school libraries. By the time he was eighteen he was so accomplished a naturalist that he brought out a work on the antennæ of insects and their organs of hearing. His first romance was given to the press about the same time.

Nodier's was a stirring childhood and early youth. At the age of thirteen he had some experience of the horrors



NODIER



of the Reign of Terror, for his father was head of the revolutionary tribunal at Besançon. In 1793, the warm-hearted and determined little boy saved a woman's life. A lady of the town was accused of sending money to an *émigré* relation in the Royalist army of the Rhine. The charge was proved beyond a doubt, and the provisions of the law in such a case being unmistakable, the lady's fate was apparently sealed. A mutual friend of his family and the lady told the whole story to young Nodier, who first vainly attempted to move his father by entreaties, and then declared that he would kill himself if the death sentence were passed. He was so much in earnest, and seemed so resolved to carry out his threat, that at the last moment the father, in dread of losing his son, did violence to his Roman virtue, and acquitted the offender. In the same year, Besançon not offering sufficient educational advantages, young Nodier was sent to Strasburg. It so happened that he was boarded there in the house of the notorious Eulogius Schneider, the cruel governor of Alsace, who shortly afterwards perished on the scaffold in Paris. The scenes he saw in Strasburg were well adapted to quicken the imagination of a future writer of romance. As a youth in Paris he was a witness of the frivolity and pleasure-seeking that prevailed under the Directory, and after his return to Besançon in 1799 he interested himself in the cause of the state prisoners and suspected persons in that town. This led to his being denounced as dangerous to society; one night his door was broken open and his papers were examined, but nothing more incriminating was found than his works on the antennæ of insects and the roots of words. The excitement of the situation satisfied his romantic love of adventure; it pleased him to be at war with the authorities, to run risks, to know he was spied upon, &c. He had no political convictions then or later, but he was an enthusiast in the cause of liberty, and always belonged to the Opposition, whatever the Government of the moment might be; he was religious under the Republic, a free-thinker under the Empire, &c., &c. The despotism of the First Consul so exasperated him that at the age of twenty

he wrote an ode against him entitled *La Napoléone*. Arrests were made tight and left in the hope of finding the author, and when at last the printer was imprisoned, Nodier gave himself up. After several months' imprisonment in Paris he was sent back to his native town, where he was placed under the surveillance of the police.

This was the beginning of a long series of persecutions and annoyances on the part of the Government, which, although certainly exaggerated by the young poet's lively and always active imagination, must have been anything but pleasant to him. He went from one hiding-place to another in the Jura Mountains, living and writing in unfrequented spots, and never staying long enough in any one place to complete the work begun there. Thus, in addition to all the impressions of the period already received, he had experience, at a very early age, of the emotions of the exile and the mood of the *émigré*. It is these moods and emotions which form the background of his first literary attempt. *Le Peintre de Salzbourg* was written during his incessant changes of abode among the Jura Mountains.

*Le Peintre de Salzbourg, journal des émotions d'un cœur souffrant, suivi des Méditations du Cloître*, is the title of the first edition, published in Paris, 1803. The *Méditations du Cloître*, a sort of appendix to this edition of the romance, possesses a certain interest as the expression of one of the ideas prevailing among the young generation. It is written with the same intention as *René*, being, namely, a plea for the restoration of monasteries. It is a monologue, spoken by a being peculiarly unhappy in his own estimation, who bewails the absence of any monastery wherein to take refuge, and naïvely seeks to prove his vocation for the life of a Trappist by a perfect torrent of complaint. "I, who am still so young and yet so unhappy, who have too early gauged life and society, and am completely estranged from the fellow-men who have wounded my heart, I, bereft of every hope which has hitherto deluded me, have sought a haven in my misery and found none." Hereon follows a long panegyric on monks and nuns, those "angels of peace, who did nought

but pray, console the wretched, educate the young, tend the sick, help the needy, follow the condemned to the scaffold, and bind up the wounds of heroes." How explain the fact that these devout men and women have brought down on themselves a fury of persecution unequalled in the annals of fanaticism? How can the legislators of the eighteenth century have had so little knowledge of the human heart as not to understand, not to divine the existence of those needs, to supply which religion founded monasteries?

"To the present generation political circumstances have given the education that fell to the lot of Achilles. We have been fed on the blood and the marrow of lions; and now that a government which leaves nothing to chance and which determines the future has set limits to the dangerous development of the powers of youth, saying to them: 'Thus far and no farther!'—do they understand now what melancholy occurrences result from so much suppressed passion and unemployed strength, how many temptations to crime exist in a passionate, melancholy, world-weary heart? With bitterness, with horror, I set it down: Werther's pistol and the executioner's axe have already made a clearing amongst us. The present generation rises up and demands the cloisters of old."

Assuredly a humble and sentimental desire for a generation nourished on the marrow of lions! But we discern defiance behind the meekness, and the demand is not to be taken literally. It is impatient despondency grasping at random at any means of alleviating its woe.

In a preface which Nodier added to his book in 1840, he speaks of the circumstances which produced it. Under the Directory, he says, emotionalism was very much out of fashion; the language of reverie and passion, to which thirty years before Rousseau had lent a passing vogue, was considered ridiculous at the close of the century. But it was quite otherwise in Germany, "that wonderful Germany, the final refuge of poetry in Europe, the cradle of the society of the future (if a society can still come into being in Europe). And we were beginning to feel the influence of



Germany. . . . We read *Werther*, *Goetz von Berlichingen*, and *Die Räuber*."

The hero of Nodier's book is fashioned after the pattern of Werther; he is twenty years of age, a painter, a poet, and, above all, a German. But he is a weak imitation, decidedly inferior to the original. Charles (Nodier's own name) is an exile, banished from Bavaria for political offences. For two years he has roamed through Europe, a restless fugitive, for two years has lived Nodier's own life. One feeling alone has sustained him, his love for a young girl who bears the poetical name of Eulalia. He returns to Bavaria, and learns—hear it, ye heavens!—that Eulalia is faithless! Eulalia is wedded to another! The betrayed lover cannot resist his desire to haunt the place of her abode. One day they meet, and—O Destiny!—Eulalia tells him that, never hearing from him, and being told he was dead, she had sorrowfully, and solely out of obedience to her mother, at last consented to marry a young Herr Spronck, whose fancied resemblance to Charles touched her, and who is, it appears, the noblest of men. On this follow lamentations and descriptions of feeling of the Werther type, but all in a much more dejected key. Charles abandons himself to melancholy retrospect. Here it was that he saw her for the first time; there that he had the first dark forebodings of the future; in this other place, in his ecstasy at beholding her, he forgot his paper, his pencils, and his "Ossian"; yonder, where the trees are now hewn down, he had determined to bury his dear Werther; now it is his own grave that he would fain dig. Werther has been Charles's friend, the friend on whom he has obviously formed himself. On one occasion only is Charles more energetic and manly than Werther, namely in his outburst of indignation at the obstacles which interpose themselves between him and his beloved.

"Why did I not take her in my arms, seize her like a prey, carry her far from the abodes of man, and proclaim her my wife in the sight of heaven! Oh, if even this desire be a crime, why is it so intimately entwined with every fibre of my being that I cannot renounce it

and live? A crime, did I say! In uncivilised times, in the days of ignorance and of slavery, some one or other of the barbarous horde took it into his head to write down his personal prejudices and say: 'There are laws for you!' How easily deluded men are! What a contemptible comedy to see so many generations ruled by the prejudices and whims of a dead past!"

Immediately upon this follows, quaintly enough, a long, solemn panegyric on Klopstock's *Messiah*, obviously inspired by other, but very dissimilar, reminiscences of Werther. "O divine Klopstock!" cries Charles, "how magnificently you present the assembled miracles of poetry to our eyes, whether you introduce us into the presence-chamber of the Most High, where the first-born among the angels hymn the mysteries of heaven, or show us the cherubims in holy adoration covering their faces with their golden wings!" The transition from revolutionary sentiments to pious ecstasy is somewhat abrupt, but the mixture of revolutionary with romantic tendencies which would seem extraordinary in any other age, does not surprise in the Emigrant Literature. It is to be found in all its authors. We have it in Chateaubriand as Satanic Catholicism; in Sénancour as sentimental and romantic atheism; here it is revolt against social laws in combination with enthusiasm for the *Messiah*—different developments of the same phenomenon.

It presently appears that Eulalia's husband is no happier than her unfortunate lover. He has been deprived by death of the love of his youth and cannot forget his bereavement even by the side of Eulalia. He observes the attachment existing between his wife and Charles, and, not wishing to stand in their way, takes poison and dies, after begging them to forgive the suffering he has involuntarily caused them "by his hapless existence." It would be impossible to imagine a more considerate husband. The lovers, however, are not a whit less noble. Eulalia especially is too high-minded to profit by so melancholy a death. She retires to a convent, and Charles drowns himself in the Danube. Two suicides and a retreat to a nunnery was the regulation ending in those days.

To us, nowadays, this romance is a very insignificant intellectual production, but a very interesting piece of historical evidence. Its author soon passed into another phase of development. We shall find Nodier again upon a higher plane of the evolution of French literature; no one changed form more frequently than he — and the butterfly is more beautiful than the grub.

## VII

### CONSTANT: "ON RELIGION"—"ADOLPHE"

THE literary critic passing from one variety to another of the type of a certain period in a manner resembles the scientist tracking some structure through its metamorphoses in the different zoological species. The next variant of our main type who seems to me worthy of study, is Benjamin Constant's *Adolphe*, the hero of the only romance written by that famous political author. Adolphe is less brilliant than René, less melancholy than Obermann, but he is a representative of the same restless and unsatisfied generation. He too is related to Werther, but, like René, he is the child of the age of disillusionment. It was not until after the fall of the Empire that the book appeared, but it was written, or at any rate projected, in the first years of the century. Like those other books which on their emotional side are in touch with Rousseau, and which perpetuate his tradition, it conflicted sharply with the prevailing sentiments of the day. In Paris figures and the sword held sway, in literature the classic ode and science were in vogue, whereas in Constant's book emotions and psychical analysis predominated.

Benjamin Constant de Rebecque was born at Lausanne in 1767, of Protestant parents. His mother died in childbirth; his father, a cold-hearted, worldly-wise man, was much such another as the father in *Adolphe*. Constant was an exceptionally gifted being. If, in reading *Adolphe*, we find it a little difficult to understand the extraordinary fascination exercised by the hero, the explanation is, that, having employed so many reminiscences of his own life in the making of the book, Constant seems to have shrunk from dwelling too strongly on his hero's attractive qualities. Adolphe

is so distinctly Constant himself, that we can only, so to speak, understand how the type originated, by studying the author's youth.

Constant was refined and charming, early addicted to a sort of sportive self-mockery, excitably impressionable, and, curiously enough, at the same time slightly *blasé*. To a craving for strong emotions was added a gift of putting himself entirely outside his own emotions. Even as a youth he was able to halve himself, to double himself, and to mock at himself. He could say: "I am as amused by the embarrassments in which I find myself as though they were another's," and his favourite expressions when angry were such as this: "I storm, I am beside myself with fury, and yet at the bottom of it all I am indifferent."

No pains were spared to give this brilliant, intellectual youth an education suited to his gifts. He was first sent to the University of Edinburgh, where he formed friendships with several distinguished young Englishmen and Scotchmen, almost all of whom were destined to become famous. From Edinburgh he went to the small, peaceful University of Erlangen, where the foundation was laid of his acquaintance with German literature and German affairs in general. Here, as in Edinburgh, he displayed more interest in the politics of the old Greek republics than in their poetry.

We gain the most trustworthy information on the subject of Constant's youthful character and development from his letters to Mme. de Charrière, a gifted, free-thinking Swiss authoress, Dutch by birth but completely Gallicised, who was over forty years of age when Constant, then in his twentieth year, first made her acquaintance. It was in this lady's house, sitting beside her while she wrote, that, at the age of nineteen, he began the great book on religion at which he was to work almost all his life, making perpetual alterations as his views changed and took more definite form. He finished it thirty years later, in the hours which he could spare from the Chamber and the Paris gambling-tables. But it was begun at Mme. de Charrière's; and there was a curious significance in the fact that the first instalment was written on the backs of a pack of playing



BENJAMIN CONSTANT



CONSTANT: "ON RELIGION"—"ADOLPHE"

cards, each card, as it was filled, being handed to his mentor. Constant expresses himself with absolute frankness in his letters to this faithful and devoted friend; from them we learn how he felt and thought as a youth. The feelings and thoughts are those of the eighteenth century, minus its enthusiasm for certain ideas, and plus a good deal of doubt. He writes:—

"I feel the emptiness of everything more than ever; it is all promise and no fulfilment. I feel how superior our powers are to our circumstances, and how wretched this incongruity must inevitably make us. I wonder if God, who created us and our environment, did not die before He finished His work, if the world is not an *opus posthumum*? He had the grandest and most beautiful intentions, and all the means for carrying them out. He had begun to use these means, the scaffolding for the building was erected, but in the midst of His work He died. Everything is constructed with an aim which has ceased to exist; we, in particular, feel ourselves destined for something of which we can form no conception. We are like clocks without dials or hands, whose wheels, which are not without understanding, revolve until they are worn out, without knowing why, but saying, 'I revolve, therefore I have an aim.'—Farewell, you dear, clever wheel, who have the misfortune to be so superior to the clock-work of which you are a part and which you disturb! Without too much self-praise I may say that I am in the same predicament."

In another place he writes: "Oh, how generous, how magnanimous are our princes! They have again issued a pardon from which none are excluded save those who have rebelled against them. It reminds me of a psalm in praise of the exploits of the Hebrew God. He has slain this one and that, for His mercy endureth for ever; He has drowned Pharaoh and all his hosts, for His mercy endureth for ever; He has smitten the first-born of Egypt with death, for His mercy endureth for ever, &c. &c."

"You do not appear to be democratic. Like you, I believe fraud and frenzy to be at the bottom of the Revolutionist's heart. But I prefer the fraud and frenzy which



pulls down prisons, abolishes titles and such like imbecilities, and places all religious day-dreams upon the same footing, to the fraud and madness which would maintain and consecrate that monstrosity produced by grafting the barbaric stupidity of the Hebrew upon the barbaric ignorance of the Vandal."

"The more one thinks it over, the less is one able to imagine any possible good reason for the existence of this foolish thing we call the world. I understand neither the intention, nor the master-builder, nor the artist, nor the figures in this *Laterna Magica* of which I have the honour to form a part. Shall I understand any better when I have disappeared from the small, dark globe on which it amuses I know not what unseen power to have me dance, whether I will or no? I cannot say. But I fear the secret will prove, like that of the Freemasons, to be a thing of no value except in the estimation of the uninitiated."

Having read these extracts, it does not surprise us to know that the book *On Religion*, planned at the close of the century to effect the same object from a Protestant standpoint that Chateaubriand aimed at from a Catholic, namely, the revival of the religious spirit in France, had originally a very different character from that which it finally acquired. If the first part were published as it was originally written, entirely in the eighteenth-century manner, it would indicate in its author exactly the stage of mental development indicated in Chateaubriand by his book on the *Revolutions*. In the form in which it has taken its place in French literature the work is remarkable for its calm, passionless style, its unprejudiced views, and an erudition not common at that period. Its weaknesses are its total lack of warmth and the general indecision of its principles.

The main idea is as follows: All the earlier conceptions of the nature of religion have been imperfect. One school of writers, who regard religion as inaccessible by the path of reason, and who believe it to have been imparted to man once for all by divine revelation, seek to restore it to its original form. Another school, rightly appalled by the evils resulting from intolerance and fanaticism, have

rejected religion as a delusion, and have sought to base an ethical system upon a purely earthly foundation. A third have believed themselves able to steer a middle course; they accept something which they call natural religion, or the religion of reason, and which consists only of the purest dogmas and the simplest fundamental principles. But the adherents of this school, like those of the first two, believe that mankind can attain to absolute truth—that truth, therefore, is one and unchangeable; they stigmatise all who believe less than themselves as ungodly, and all who believe more as priest-ridden and superstitious. In opposition to all these three schools, Constant regards religion as progressive; he starts from the premise that the religious feeling is a fundamental element of the human soul, that it is only the forms it assumes which differ, and that these are capable of ever-increasing perfection. He has obviously read Lessing's *Erziehung des Menschengeschlechts*; but he is more in sympathy with his own contemporaries, Kreuzer and Görres, than with Lessing. He either does not understand or does not appreciate the latter's delicate and yet profound irony; he is captivated by the Romantic-Protestant revival ideas, and assimilates as much of them as a French Liberal politician and converted Voltairean can. He strongly objects to the spirit of intolerance and persecution which makes itself felt so strongly in Lamennais' book on "Indifference in Matters of Religion;" unlike Chateaubriand and De Maistre, he objects to the temporal power of the Papacy, or to any other combination of spiritual and temporal power; but he imagines that in his *sentiment religieux* he has discovered a kind of spiritual primary element, incapable of further resolution, an element which is unalterable and universal, *i.e.* diffused over the whole earth and unaffected by time; and upon this theory, which is incompatible with the data of psychology, he bases his whole conservative system. As far as possible he evades troublesome questions: he refuses, for example, to decide whether mankind came into being in a savage or in a paradisaically perfect condition; and he expressly states that he begins with a delineation of the lowest fetish worship only for the sake of order, that he by no

means denies that this pitiable stage may have been the result of a fall, this hypothesis, indeed, seeming to him a very probable one.—Few books have more rapidly grown old-fashioned than this of Constant's, which is now merely of historical interest as typical of the half-heartedness and indecision of the period in which it was written.

In the early years of the French Revolution, Constant was appointed gentleman-in-waiting to the Duchess of Brunswick. In this position he heard the Revolution spoken of with that mixture of fear and abhorrence of which we have an example in the dialogue of Goethe's play, *Der Bürgergeneral*; but he had no difficulty in forming an independent and unprejudiced estimate of the significance of the great movement. In Brunswick, as elsewhere, much of his time seems to have been spent in amours, one following on the other in rapid succession. He himself jestingly assumed *Sola inconstantia constans* as his motto. He married, solely out of ennui, it would appear, divorced his wife after the honeymoon, and presently fell in love with a lady who was at the time suing for a divorce from her husband. For this lady's sake he returned at a later period to Brunswick. Her maiden name was Charlotte von Hardenberg, and many years afterwards she became his second wife. In the letters of this Brunswick period to Mme. de Charrière, Constant appears as aimless and bored as he is sagacious and witty. He makes merry over his stupid, little-minded associates, and for a time even over his feeling for the lady of his heart, until it suddenly occurs to him that jesting on this latter subject is scarcely seemly, and he decides to forego it. So far there was neither a centre nor an object in his life.

Towards the close of 1774, however, a decisive change took place. He met Mme. de Staël, and it became apparent that neither of these two minds could produce the best of which it was capable without the assistance of the other. Constant was then twenty-seven years of age, Mme. de Staël twenty-eight. He had just arrived in Paris, the city to which his ambition had long attracted him, but which he now saw for the first time. He was introduced into the best society, frequented the houses of Mme. Tallien, Mme. Beauharnais,

and Mme. de Staël, and made an impression both by his personal beauty and his intellectual gifts. With his fresh complexion and fair hair he resembled a young Northerner, but in mind he was the acute Frenchman, and in culture the cosmopolitan. He made an impression on the most gifted Frenchwoman of the day that was never effaced, even when the circumstances of life estranged and separated them, and it was soon no secret that Mme. de Staël's admiration had become passionate love. She imparted to the rising statesman her faith in political liberty, her enthusiasm for the rights of the individual, and for a government which should assure them; and her fiery ardour inspired him with her spirit of enterprise and with her confidence in the power of words and of deeds to influence, to re-mould life in spite of destiny. In return for this, her relation to him seems, by setting her at variance with society, to have supplied her with the greater part of the passions, emotions, and rebellious thoughts which form the kernel of her imaginative writings.

At Mme. de Staël's house Constant met a whole host of foreign diplomatists, disaffected journalists, and plotting women, who for the moment influenced him against the Convention. He soon, however, arrived at convictions of his own, refuted his first newspaper articles, and, more radical than his friend, joined the "Patriot" party in opposing the so-called Moderates, in whom he perceived no moderation. The year 1795 he spent, on the invitation of Mme. de Staël, at her country-house of Coppet, in Switzerland; the following year she was separated from her husband.

When, as First Consul, in 1799, Napoleon gave France a constitution, in which autocracy was veiled by a slight pretence of freedom, he nominated Constant, formerly his ardent admirer, a member of the Tribunate. In this capacity Constant, supported by some few sympathisers, carried on an honourable struggle against the Napoleonic absolutism, a struggle which attracted the attention of all Europe, and highly exasperated the First Consul. In 1802 the latter made the famous remark about the five or six metaphysicians among the Tribunes who deserved to be

drowned, and not long after, these five or six, namely Constant and his friends, were expelled by the votes of a servile majority. Mme. de Staël and her father, the famous Necker, showing themselves actively antagonistic to Napoleon's autocratic policy, were both banished from France. Constant, who followed Mme. de Staël to Coppet, was forbidden to return. In May 1802, Mme. de Staël became a widow. In 1803-4 she and Constant travelled together in Germany. She, loving him devotedly, evidently seems to have expected that he would marry her; but it is plain that he did not reciprocate her feeling; it was only out of weakness and compassion that he concealed from her his constant correspondence with Charlotte von Hardenberg. Having probably invented some pretext for leaving her, he went to Weimar alone. There, in 1804, he translated Schiller's *Wallenstein* into French. It was not Constant but A. W. Schlegel who accompanied Mme. de Staël to Italy in 1805 (as tutor to her children), on the journey immortalised in *Corinne*. Constant was privately married to his Charlotte in the summer of 1808, and so little was Madame de Staël resigned to his defection, that terrible scenes occurred when she unexpectedly met the newly married pair in the neighbourhood of Geneva. Charlotte, driven to despair by her rival's furious jealousy, made an unsuccessful attempt to commit suicide. So great was Madame de Staël's influence over Constant, that she actually persuaded him to leave his wife and return for a time with her to Coppet.

For some years after this episode Benjamin Constant lived in quiet retirement at Göttingen, occupied with collecting material for his work on the origin and development of religion. The defeat of Napoleon in 1813 brought him and his friend Madame de Staël once more into the political arena. Her influence at the courts of Russia, Germany, and Sweden gave him a voice in the proceedings against the defeated autocrat. He went to Paris in Bernadotte's train, and, although he was in favour of the restoration of the monarchy, he strove ardently to save all that could be saved of constitutional liberty. He published masterly pamphlets on the liberty of the press, on ministerial respon-

sibility, &c. It is well known that immediately after this, his blind infatuation for Mme. Récamier caused him to take such violent action against Napoleon on the latter's return from Elba, that there seems something traitorous in his acceptance of a post in the Council of State during the Hundred Days, and his collaboration in the Emperor's attempt to give France a species of constitution.

We must not judge Constant as a politician by this unfortunate episode. Under the Bourbons, and even during the first years of the reign of Louis Philippe, he was the determined and eloquent leader of the Liberal Opposition. Though never remarkable for purity of character, he had noble impulses. When in 1830 he received a letter from one of his friends in Paris saying, "A terrible game is being played here; our heads are in danger; come and add yours!" he did not hesitate for a moment, but came and undauntedly sided with the revolutionists. A few months later, however, although he was at the time leader of the Opposition, he accepted 100,000 francs from Louis Philippe for the purpose of paying his gambling debts. Constant was an accomplished dialectician. No truth, he was accustomed to observe, is complete unless it includes its antithesis. He succeeded in completing many truths. The imprint set upon him by the period in which his youth had fallen was never effaced. The doubleness which in the other notable men of the same generation is only a secondary quality, is in Constant's character the essential, distinguishing, and, at the same time, disturbing trait.

*Adolphe*, the chief work of this man's youth, deserves some study. In it we find the following utterance: "What surprises me is, not that humanity should feel the need of a religion, but that it should in any age fancy itself strong enough, and sufficiently secure from disaster, to venture to reject any one religion. It seems to me as if in its weakness it should rather be prone to invoke the aid of them all. Is there, in the dense darkness which surrounds us, any ray of light that we can afford to reject? Does there float on the whirling torrent which carries us along with it any branch to which we dare refuse to cling?" We feel that

the author is more certain of the existence of the whirling torrent than of the branch. His manner of recommending religion reveals his own lack of it, and a profound depth of melancholy.

The explanation is simple. There was a reaction against Voltaire in the air at that time, a reaction practically inaugurated by Rousseau—the rebound of repressed, unconsulted, ignored feeling. A half-unconscious effort was going on in men's minds to restore the balance between the demands and the possibilities of the human soul which had been disturbed during the autocratic reign of critical intellect; and this half-conscious tendency was plainly perceptible even in men whose natures were really akin to Voltaire's, and who, had they been born thirty years earlier, would have been his eager sympathisers and fellow-workers. Voltaire had not only criticised, he had been forced by the evils of the times and by his unruly wit into an attitude of aggression. With all available weapons, even poisoned ones, he had attacked those purely external, palpable forms of authority, which in his time stood in the way of honourable human conditions, nay, made them impossible. Now all these powers had fallen, and the times once more craved authority. There are inner, spiritual authorities. The Right, the Good, the True are such. But the enthusiastic attempts to introduce and establish a free form of government which should realise these ideals without the invocation of any authority unexplainable by reason, had resulted in the savage excesses of lawlessness. What wonder, then, that not only many ordinary individuals began to grope after planks from the wreck of the once powerful political and religious systems, but that also a majority of the most highly gifted came forward as the champions of some authority, either temporal or spiritual, which they supported for the sake of the principle, but with no real belief or confidence in it.

They had no real confidence, for the simple reason that for them, as genuine and intelligent sons of the young nineteenth century, it was impossible to believe in the strength of a stem which their fathers had sawn through. Chateaubriand's faith in legitimacy was as faint-hearted as Constant's

in religion in general. Men were uneasy in their minds. The old house was burned down. The new was not even begun. And, instead of boldly beginning to erect a new building, events led them to seek refuge among the ruins of the old, the half-burned materials of which they built up as best they could. During this performance they were perpetually tempted to try experiments not planned from the first. After some vain attempts to give solidity to the building by the addition of new material, they would in despair give a kick at the shaky, newly built walls, which brought them down again. No group of writers whose aim was to preserve society ever brought such passionate accusations against it as the authors of the Emigrant Literature. It is one of these accusations of society which forms the basis of Benjamin Constant's *Adolphe*.

*Adolphe* is a love story which, in its presentment of the relations of the individual to society, takes a quite different point of view from *Werther*. In *Werther* outward, and, by reason of these, also inward, obstacles prevent the union of a couple obviously made for each other. In *Adolphe* outward, and because of them, also inward, reasons part two beings who are united. *Werther* represents the power of society, and of once-accepted social responsibilities, to hinder a love match. *Adolphe* describes the power of society and of public opinion to absolve from accepted personal responsibilities and to sever a long-united pair. The books, taken together, form a double picture of the pope-like power of society to bind and loose. But whereas *Werther* depicts the feelings of the pre-revolutionary, enthusiastic, energetic generation to which its author belonged, the feelings described in *Adolphe* are those of the first French generation of the new century.

Unlike former love stories, *Adolphe* does not delineate love only in its first awakening in the dawn of delusive hopes, but follows it through its whole existence, depicts its growth, its strength, its decay, its death, and even pursues it to the other side of the grave and shows the feelings into which it is transformed. Hence *Adolphe*, even more than *René*, is the story of the individual's rude awakening from



delusion, the representation of the anguish of disappointment. It is the flower of life which is here stripped of its petals one by one and carefully dissected. In this point, too, the book is a great contrast to *Werther*. *Werther* is naïve in comparison. It is the same flower, the perfume of which is a deadly poison to Werther, that is calmly dissected by Adolphe. The change is expressed in the very costume; the blue coat and yellow waistcoat have made way for our dull, funereal black.

But the flame which is extinguished in the man's breast now burns in the woman's. *Adolphe* is woman's *Werther*. The passion and melancholy of the new age have advanced another step; they have spread to the other sex. In *Werther* it was the man who loved, suffered, stormed, and despaired; in comparison with him the woman was sound, strong, and unharmed—perhaps a trifle cold and insignificant. But now it is her turn, now it is she who loves and despairs. In *Werther* it was the woman who submitted to the laws of society, in *Adolphe* it is the man who does so. The self-same war waged by Werther in the name of his love is now waged by Eléonore, and with equally tragic result.

It is scarcely an exaggeration to call this romance the prototype of a whole new species of fiction, namely that which occupies itself with psychical analysis. It is its treatment of love that is new. Far behind us now lies the time when Amor was represented as the charming child we all know from Thorwaldsen's bas-reliefs. To Voltaire Amor was the god of pleasure. "Les ris, les jeux et les plaisirs" were his attendants. To Rousseau he is the god of passion. With Goethe he has ceased to be a beneficent spirit; we understand when we read Goethe what Schopenhauer meant when he wrote that Amor pursues his way, indifferent to the misery of the individual. In *Faust*, the first poem of the new era, he is transformed from a roguish boy into a criminal. Faust seduces Gretchen and deserts her; Gretchen's love-story means the death of her mother, her brother, her infant, and herself. She, the innocent, loving girl, kills her mother with the sleeping-draught she administers in order that Faust may visit

her by night ; Faust and Mephistopheles together slay the brother who attempts to avenge his sister's disgrace ; from fear of shame Gretchen kills her new-born child, for which she is thrown into prison and finally executed. Goethe's passion for truth impelled him to paint a very different picture of Amor from that which represents him as the rose-crowned boy. And in Goethe it is not only in its consequences but in its very nature that love is fraught with fate. In *Elective Affinities* he has made a study of the mysterious and irresistible attraction and repulsion by which the mutual relations of souls are determined, as if they were chemical substances. The book is a kind of study of passion from the point of view of natural philosophy ; Goethe shows us its rise, its magic power as a mysterious natural force, its foundation in the unfathomed depths of our soul.

An attempt had thus been made to explain the attraction to which we give the name of love by instituting a parallel between it and the attraction with which we are familiar in inanimate nature. But there was yet another step to be taken, namely, to dissociate love from everything with which it had hitherto been connected, and analyse it. This task fell to the lot of the unsettled, unsatisfied generation to which Constant belongs. However much men had differed in their conception of love, its causes and its consequences, they had all agreed in accepting the emotion itself as something understood, something simple. They now for the first time began to treat it as something composite, and to attempt to resolve it into its elements. In *Adolphe*, and the fiction which follows in its steps, an accurate calculation is made of how many parts, how many grains, of friendship, how many of devotion, of vanity, ambition, admiration, respect, sensual attraction, hope, imagination, disappointment, hatred, weariness, enthusiasm, calculation, &c. on the part of each, go to make up the compound which the two concerned call their love. With all this analysis the emotion lost its supernatural character, and the worship of it ceased. Instead of its poetry, its psychology was offered to the reader. What happened resembled that which happens when we

look at a star through a telescope; its bright rays disappear, only the astronomical body remains: before, in the bright full moon we saw only a clear, shining disc with an unchanging face; now, we distinguish a multitude of mountains and valleys.

From the moment when men began to desire really to understand, they necessarily fixed their attention less upon that first awakening of the emotion, which poets had sung and celebrated from time immemorial, than upon its later development, its duration and its cessation. In those tragedies which are to be found in the literature of all races, which are, as it were, their hymns to love, the death of the lovers follows close upon the blossoming time of their love. Romeo sees Juliet; they adore one another; after a few days and nights passed in the seventh heaven, both lie dead. The question of constancy does not occur. Our Danish love-tragedy, *Axel and Valborg*, seems, indeed, to deal with nothing but constancy; the whole plot turns on the prolonged engagement of the lovers, a characteristically national pivot—but in *Axel and Valborg* constancy is glorified as a virtue, not explained as a product, for the play is a lyrical tragedy, not a psychological analysis.

It is the question of the conditions of constancy which is treated of in *Adolphe*—under what conditions is passion lasting or otherwise? And it is the answer to this question which is really an impeachment of society. For it is maintained that while society, in this case represented by public opinion, upholds those unions which are of its own institution, it at the same time basely strives to destroy all possibilities of faithfulness in any union it has not sanctioned, even if that union be to the full as honourable, to the full as unselfish, as any of those which it fences round and supports.

Constant prefers his accusation in a story which could hardly be less pretentious. It contains but two characters, no scenery, and there is not a single fortuitous incident in the whole course of its action. Everything occurs according to the natural laws indicated by the relations of the couple to each other and to society in general. The reader follows

this history of two souls to its close much as a student of chemistry watches the fermentation of two substances in an inexplosible phial and observes the results. Who, then, are these two characters?

In the first place, who is *he*? He is a very young man, who (like the author) has been given an appointment at one of the little German courts, after completing his studies at a small German university. He has been tolerably dissipated, but has also gone through a course of serious and laborious study. His relations with his father, an outwardly cold, ironical man, who represents the culture of the eighteenth century, have increased the hero's youthful taste for powerful, passionate emotions, and his leaning to the unusual, the extravagant. His father's severe discipline has inspired him with an impatient longing for freedom from the bonds which gall him, and a strong disinclination to let himself be trammelled by new ones.

At this stage of his development he comes to a court where monotony and formality reign. To him, who from his earliest youth has felt an unconquerable aversion to dogmatism and formalism, it is positive suffering to be obliged to listen to his companions' eternal platitudes. "The self-satisfied chatter of mediocrity about absolutely unquestionable and unshakable religious, moral, or social principles, all considered of equal importance, drove me to contradict, not so much because I was of a different opinion as because I had no patience with such clumsy, stolid certainty. I was involuntarily on the alert against all these general maxims which are considered universally applicable, without restriction or modification. The block-heads knead their morality into such an indivisible mass that it cannot possibly permeate their actions and be applicable in individual cases."

He revenges himself for the boredom which his associates inflict on him by jesting at them and their ideals, and soon acquires a character for ill-natured frivolity. He does not himself approve of his own contradictory, mocking spirit. "But," he says, "I may urge in self-defence that it takes time to accustom one's self to such beings, to that

which selfishness, affectation, vanity, and cowardice have made of them. The astonishment a man in his early youth feels at such an artificial, arbitrarily regulated state of society witnesses rather to the naturalness of his character than to depraved tendencies. Besides, this society has nothing to fear from such as us ; it weighs us down, its foolish influence is so strong that it quickly moulds us to the general pattern. Then we only wonder that we were ever astonished. We become accustomed to the new life as men become accustomed to the air in a room full of people, where at first they feel as if they could not breathe."

These skirmishes with his narrow surroundings were not sufficient to satisfy the gifted young man ; his discontent is perpetually with him, he drags it about as a man drags a weight attached to his leg. Like René and Obermann, he belongs to a generation of sons to whom their fathers did not appear to have left anything to do worth doing. The future has no interest for him, for he has anticipated it in imagination, and the past has made him old, for he has lived in thought through many a century. He has desired much, but willed nothing, and the more lacking in will he feels himself, the vainer does he become ; for vanity is the invariable stop-gap with which those in whom will or ability is defective, attempt to fill the lacunæ in their will or ability. He wishes to love and to be loved, looking on love in the light of a tonic for his self-esteem. He expects to attain to a stronger persuasion of his own worth, to be raised in his own and other people's eyes, by some great triumph and scandal. The happiness that love is to bring to him is the happiness of feeling for once that his will is strong, because he is able to bend another's to it. He is not by nature more faithless than other men. It is in him to love more tenderly, to act more unselfishly than many do, but for him to love faithfully many circumstances would need to be altered. He is still so young that there is more of curiosity and of the spirit of adventure in his feeling for a woman than of real love ; and even if he loved deeply, he is too weak, too little of the man, to be able to love on in spite of society's disapproval of his passion ;

above all, in spite of his unlikeness to his father, he is too much his son to be able, without despising or deceiving himself, to stake his whole existence on one card. He differs from and yet resembles his father, just as the beginning of the nineteenth century differed from and yet resembled the eighteenth.

And who is *she*? She is carefully described by the author as being such that Adolphe's love for her, however strong, is certain sooner or later to be affected by social considerations. In the first place, Adolphe is not the only man she has loved, and the verdict of society has been passed upon her before they meet; she is not his equal in its eyes, although she is so by birth. In the second place, she is considerably older than he; and in the third, hers is a passionate, power-loving nature, which could only be fused with his if social conditions favoured the process, and which must make both unhappy if they harden him against her.

When Adolphe makes her acquaintance, Eléonore is no young, inexperienced girl, who learns for the first time what love is; she is a woman, whose new emotions stand out upon a background of sad, harrowing experience. The mark which this experience has set upon her is the first noticeable trait in her personality. Eléonore has relinquished her right to all the privileges and pleasures of a safe-guarded, peaceful life. Although of good family and born to wealth, she has left home and family to follow the man she loves, as his mistress. She has chosen between the world and him, and has ennobled her action by entirely, unconditionally sacrificing herself for his sake. She has done him the greatest services, has saved his fortune, and been as faithful as any wife could be, endeavouring by this absolute fidelity to solace the pride wounded by the reprobation and scorn of the world. Strength of will is the second noticeable feature of the character.

When the first doubt of her friend's constancy assails her, the whole edifice that she has raised crumbles to pieces. Does he love her, or does he only treat her as a man of honour must? is he faithful, or is he only too proud and too well-bred to show himself ungrateful and indifferent?

With tears she puts the question to herself, with anguish answers it. It is at this moment that she meets Adolphe. He is drawn to her with a desire in which his whole thirst for life and all that life contains is concentrated, drawn as to one in whom he mysteriously feels treasures of passion, tenderness, enthusiasm, intellect, and experience to be accumulated, buried, as it were. And his longing and her regret, his vanity and her despair, his youth and her disappointment take hold of each other like two wheels in the works of a watch.

It is easy to foresee with what a fiery flame this passion will blaze at first, to foretell what a full and mighty chord, what a joyful pæan will resound, as though both had won complete and lasting victory and salvation. There is a new and strange mixture in her feeling—an enthusiasm which is almost fanatical, because it must be equal to the task of stifling his constantly recurring jealousy of the past; a faith which is almost convulsive, because it is not based upon sound, natural confidence, but upon a determination to believe in spite of everything, even in spite of having already been deceived; and a fidelity which suffers tortures from being constantly called upon to demonstrate its existence, because it is the offspring of faithlessness towards the past. This redoublement of passion constitutes the third marked feature in Eléonore's character. "One regarded her," says Adolphe, "with the same interest and admiration with which one gazes on a magnificent thunder-storm."

It is in reality an entirely new female type which is here presented to us, a type which many years later Balzac appropriates, styles "*la femme de trente ans*," and varies with such genius that he may be said to be its second creator, and which George Sand too developed and embellished in a whole series of her novels. Under the treatment of these two authors this type proved to be a whole, hitherto unknown, world, in which every feeling, passion, and thought was infinitely stronger than in the world of the girlish heart. In time the type passed from the novel into the drama, and long usurped the French stage. In it the

early literature of the century found its queen, as in René it found its king.<sup>1</sup>

The strong, Promethean generation to which Goethe belonged had produced its type in Faust, the fully developed man, with the powerful, cultivated intellect, who, having studied in all the schools and toiled through all the sciences, becomes conscious in his manhood's prime of a void in his heart, a thirst for youth, freshness, and simplicity. Casting himself into the whirl of life, he falls in love with a child. It is her simplicity and innocence that win and intoxicate him, and arouse the desire of possession.

The unhappy generation of the homeless and exiled, the young and yet old, the believers who were at the same time unbelievers, to which Constant belongs, has its type in Adolphe, who, *blasé* in thought, though a mere child in years and experience, seeks in love strong sensations, violent emo-

<sup>1</sup> The day came when criticism uplifted its voice against this dethronement of youth and beauty. Jules Janin in his light way prefers this complaint in the form of an attack on Balzac:—

"Formerly," he writes, "as far as the novel and the drama were concerned, the woman of thirty to forty was regarded as past all possibilities in the way of passion, but now, thanks to the discovery of this new wide and smiling domain, she reigns supreme in both drama and novel. A new world has superseded the old, the woman of forty has suppressed the girl of sixteen.

"'Who knocks?' shouts drama in its deep voice. 'Who is there?' cries the novel in gentler tones. 'It is I,' answers tremblingly the girl of sixteen, with the pearly teeth, the snowy bosom, the soft outlines, the bright smile, and the gentle glance. 'It is I! I am the same age as Racine's Julie, Shakespeare's Desdemona, Molière's Agnès, Voltaire's Zaire, Abbé Prévost's Manon Lescaut, Saint-Pierre's Virginie. It is I! I am the same charming, volatile, delightful age as the young girls in Ariosto, Lesage, Byron, and Sir Walter Scott. It is I! I am innocent youth, with its hopes, with its divinely beautiful, fearless attitude towards the future. I am the age of chaste desires, of noble instincts, of pride, and of innocence. Make room for me, dear sirs!' Thus speaks the charming girl of sixteen to the novelists and the dramatists. But the novelists and the dramatists at once reply: 'We are busy with your mother, child; come again twenty years hence, and we shall see if we can make something out of you.'

"In the novel and the drama of to-day, we have no one but the woman of thirty, who will be forty to-morrow. She alone can love, she alone can suffer. She is so much more dramatic, because she cannot afford to wait. What can we make out of a little girl who can do nothing but weep, love, sigh, smile, hope, tremble? The woman of thirty does not weep, she sobs; she does not sigh, she utters anguished cries; she does not love, she is consumed with passion; she does not smile, she shrieks; she does not dream, she acts! This is drama, this is romance, this is life. Thus speak, act, and reply our great playwrights and our famous writers of fiction."

The intelligent, refined Madame Emile de Girardin defended Balzac, answering very justly: "Is it Balzac's fault that thirty is now the age of love? Balzac is obliged to paint passion where he finds it, and nowadays it is not to be found in the heart of sixteen."



tion, knowledge of life, of passion, and of the heart of woman, difficulties and dangers to overcome—in a word, mastery over woman. The young girl brought up under her mother's eye in an ordinary middle-class home does not attract him ; it would not be a sufficient triumph to master her. But with the superiority of years and experience on the woman's side, the feeling and the relation change character. The passion uniting two such dissimilar beings is something less ordinary, less conventional, less happy, but more transient than the love which we know as a social power. It is no longer the prelude to a bourgeois wedding. It seems to come into existence when, under certain conditions, the paths of two beings of a certain complex type cross or intersect each other ; but the result is not harmony.

It is not until considerably later that this new type of woman really takes possession of French literature. Saint Simon, the Revolution of July, and George Sand had to pave the way—Saint Simon with his doctrine of the emancipation of woman, and his theory that humanity can only be perfected in man and woman together, not in man alone ; the Revolution of July by destroying many of the arbitrary restrictions to which woman had been subjected ; and George Sand by carrying on, almost alone, the same struggle for the liberation of woman, which for man had been begun by the great Revolution. The fact that the type, and with it the conflict of woman with society, appears in literature so long before George Sand, is to be explained by the circumstance that *Eléonore* is modelled from the strongest woman of the day, the woman who ventured to oppose Napoleon himself—*Mme. de Staël*.

This new type forms a strong contrast to those female characters of Goethe's in which German poetry attained its highest level, and in which the characteristically Teutonic spiritual quality is expressed more perfectly than it ever had been before. Although *Gretchen* and *Clärchen* are the antitheses of each other, the one being mild and submissive, the other fiery and daring, both are children, both are absorbed by a single feeling, both have perfectly simple, single-minded natures. Both love for the first and only time.

Both give themselves to the man they love without thought of marriage, with entire trust, without any resistance, without even the wish to resist ; the one from deep womanly devotion, the other from lofty womanly enthusiasm. They do not understand that they are doing wrong, they do not think at all. Their whole being, their will, their thoughts pass out of their own possession, they themselves do not know how. Their hearts are soft as wax to receive an impression, but once received it is ineffaceable, it is as though it were stamped in gold. Their innocence, purity, and integrity are beyond compare. They are faithful by instinct, and do not dream of the possibility of being anything else. They possess no morality, but all the virtues ; for human beings are moral consciously, but good by nature. They do not consider themselves the equals of their lovers, but look up to them, as if the old legend had been realised and the sons of God had come down to the daughters of men. Gretchen is amazed and overpowered by Faust's knowledge, Clärchen kneels like a child before Egmont when he appears in his full splendour. They lose themselves, they, as it were, disappear in their lovers. What we have here is not two equals, who take each other's hands, and plight their faith to each other, but a bewildered, admiring child clinging to a man. He is her life, while she is but an episode in his. At a glance he grasps and comprehends her whole nature ; she is incapable of grasping his from any point, incapable of penetrating and judging. She can see neither his limits nor his faults. Whichever way she turns, she sees him as something gigantic, looming on every side. Hence there is in this love no criticism, no emancipation of the spirit, no employment of the understanding. He is the great, the glorious one—like Faust, who can talk of everything and has an answer for all questions, or like Egmont, whose name as a hero and a saviour is upon every tongue and who is known to the whole city. The reason why this love brings with it no spiritual emancipation is that the young girl has no spirit, in the sense of intellect ; she is pure soul. When she performs actions which would seem to require a certain amount of will or

firm determination, when Clarchen, for example, astonished and indignant that the citizens of Brussels are indifferent and cowardly enough to allow their hero to be carried off to prison and probable death, makes a public appearance in the market-place, and vainly attempts to rouse their dull souls with fiery words, the motive of the action is to be found in the young girl's naïve belief that her lover's life must be of as great importance to others as it is to her ; as she sees nothing in the world but him, she cannot imagine how others can think of anything else. These young girls are genuine daughters of the great family to which Ophelia and Desdemona belong.

A sharp contrast confronts us in the new type of Frenchwoman ; instead of sweetness, clinging affection, naturalness, we have passion, will, energy, and conscious intelligence. For it was in the most remarkable and intellectual woman of the day, a woman who had given up country, peace, and prosperity, rather than submit to the petty tyranny with which Napoleon's despotism pursued the unsubmissive, that Constant found the new type.

The appearance of woman in literature as conscious intelligence is a first step towards her appearance as genius. We already see Mme. de Staël's turban appearing on the horizon. The woman who shares man's passions and struggles will soon share his genius and his renown. Yet a little while and the struggle ends in victory, the same woman who succumbs under the name of Eléonore is crowned at the Capitol as Corinne.

It only now remains to direct attention to the accurate psychological observation in *Adolphe*, and to show the results arrived at. The hero starts, as we have seen, with the idea that the conquest of Eléonore is a task worthy of him ; he imagines that he will be able coldly to study her character, and calmly to lay his plan of campaign ; but, his susceptibility being quite as great as his egoism, he soon succumbs to a fascination which completely overmasters him, and which so increases his natural timidity that he cannot summon up courage to make the declaration which he had promised his vanity to arrive at very speedily.

He writes, but Eléonore will have nothing to say to him, and avoids him. Her resistance and coldness produce in him a submission and devotion which soon become a species of worship. Never before has Eléonore been thus loved, for however much true devotion her protector has shown her, there has always been a touch of condescension in it. He could have made a more honourable alliance ; he has never said so, but what is unsaid may quite well make itself felt. It is this reverence of Adolphe for her which wins Eléonore. She gives herself to him, and he is almost dazed with rapture and happiness. What first jars upon him is her not being able (when the Count has gone from home for a day or two) to let him out of her sight even for a few hours. She detains him when he attempts to leave her ; when he goes, she asks when he will return. Pleased and flattered at first by this boundless devotion, he soon finds that his time is so absorbed by her that he has not an hour at his own disposal. He is compelled to refuse all invitations and break off with all his acquaintances. This is no great loss to him, but he would prefer being able to come and go as he pleases to being obliged to put in an appearance at the stroke of the clock. She who had been his aim and object in life is now a tie upon him.

Where are ye now, O touching romances, in which the lover never had anything to do but to love, in which he rose up early to love, loved all day, and for love passed sleepless nights ! It is a wonderfully naturalistic touch in *Adolphe* that the lover feels his loss of time to be indeed a loss.

It avails not that he asserts his right to dispose of his time as he will, for the thought of the grief she endures when he fails to appear, prevents his making any satisfactory use of the time gained, especially as he is also tormented by a feeling of shame that another human being should have such an ascendancy over him. Then when he returns to her, annoyed with himself for having come back much sooner than was prudent for the sake of her reputation or his own work, he finds her miserable because he has stayed away so long. For two hours he has been

suffering from the knowledge that she is longing, and now he must suffer two more before he can pacify her. In spite of all this he feels happy ; he tells himself that it is sweet to be thus loved ; nevertheless, he is unconsciously consoling himself with the thought that the peculiarities of their position must, sooner or later, put an end to the situation.

The Count returns, and Adolphe first suffers from being compelled to deceive him, and then endures the torture of seeing Eléonore sacrifice everything for his own sake, give up at one and the same time her home and her fortune. It is a double grief, partly selfish, for he mourns over the inevitable restriction of his own liberty by the sacrifice she is so happy in making for him, and partly compassionate, for he knows with what hyena-like fury society will tear her reputation to pieces. All she has won by years of irreproachable behaviour she loses in one day. Her pride suffers agonies, and his devotion becomes a duty. From henceforth each has a secret suffering which is not confided to the other.

Adolphe's character begins to deteriorate. He fights a duel with a man who has spoken slightly of Eléonore, but himself unintentionally injures her reputation by the incessant mockery of women and the men who live in subjection to them in which he indulges as a kind of relief from the feeling of his own dependence ; men put their own interpretation on his jests and jeers. He who cannot resist a tear, makes a point of speaking of women with callous contempt.

Many have suffered the misery of loving without return ; Adolphe's torment consists in being loved after he has ceased to love. Eléonore sees through his efforts to appear overjoyed when they meet, and one of those terrible scenes ensues with which Mme. de Staël had made Constant familiar ; the exasperation of her passionate nature resembles hatred. An attempt is made by Adolphe's relations, who disapprove of his wasting his youth on such a connection, to get rid of Eléonore. Adolphe's chivalrous feeling impels him to run away with her, and for a time their tender feeling towards each other resembles love. Eléonore makes fresh sacrifices

which it galls Adolphe to accept. At one time she suffers as much from not being loved as he from not loving; at another she so intoxicates herself with her own passion that she sees it double and believes that it is returned. Both live in the memory of their former happiness, which is vivid enough to make parting seem painful, even impossible, but not strong enough to impart any happiness to their daily life. The tender but faint protestations of love made now and again by Adolphe to Eléonore resemble the weak, colourless leaves put forth from the branches of some uprooted tree.

He fails to make the being happy who is the cause of so much unhappiness to himself. Every time she feels that she has won new rights, he feels that he is bound by new fetters. Her passionateness makes their daily life one incessant storm. In a biography of Constant we find the following significant sentence: "This year Constant was happy; Mme. de Staël was in Russia."

Eléonore inherits her father's fortune and is no longer dependent upon Adolphe's protection. The world now suspects him of deriving pecuniary advantage from the friendship; he is blamed for injuring her reputation by being always in her company, and it is of course impossible for him to explain that it is she who will not live without him.

His life is slipping away between his fingers; he is fulfilling none of the promises of his youth; for, as he is not allowed to forget, there is an insurmountable barrier between him and any possible future, and that barrier is Eléonore. He determines to break off with her, but this very determination makes his position more hopeless, for the moment he resolves upon the death sentence (which he is too weak not to postpone) all bitterness leaves him, and he feels such tender compassion for her that she misunderstands and believes that all is well.

She makes a final violent effort to win him by rousing his jealousy; but nothing now has any effect; on all sides the rupture is represented to him as the most natural thing in the world, as a duty to his father, to his own future, even to the unhappy being to whom he is chained, and whom he is tormenting. She receives a letter which throws light on

his intentions, and soon after is attacked by a fatal fever and dies, proclaiming her devotion to her lover with her last breath.

The moment Adolphe is free he realises that freedom is now useless to him ; he no longer knows what to do with it, and longs for the old fetters.

Constant himself thus expresses the moral of the book : "The strongest passion cannot survive the struggle with the established order of things. Society is too powerful. It makes that love too bitter which it has not recognised and stamped with the seal of its approval. Woe, then, to the woman who rests her hope of happiness upon a feeling which all things combine to poison, and against which society, when it is not obliged to respect it as legal, enlists all that is basest in the human heart, with the aim of destroying all that is good."

## VIII

### MADAME DE STAËL : "DELPHINE"

IN one of his letters Byron writes of *Adolphe*: "The book contains some melancholy truths, though I believe that it is too triste a work ever to have been popular. The first time I ever read it was at the desire of Mme. de Staël." Mme. de Staël herself says somewhere: "I do not believe all men resemble *Adolphe*, but only vain men." Simple as the observation is, we feel that it is written by a woman in self-defence; for *Adolphe* had struck home to Necker's daughter personally, had bared her deepest heart wound.

Anne Marie Germaine Necker was born in Paris in 1766. Her father, the great Genevese financier, became First Minister of France shortly before the outbreak of the Revolution, and his name was at that time the watchword of liberal France. Her mother was a highly gifted woman, but stiff, reserved, and the slave of duty; she believed that education did everything, nature little, and she laid pedantic stress upon trifles, being of opinion that nothing is trifling from the moral point of view. To this lady Rousseau's educational theories were naturally highly antipathetic, and the consequence was that Rousseau, with his belief in nature and in innate virtues, became her daughter's ideal. This daughter, a frank, lively child, developed into a bright, intelligent brunette, whose dark eyes sparkled with wit and beamed with kind-heartedness. While Mme. Necker chiefly appreciated common sense and the habit of self-examination, the daughter, who suffered from the strict control under which she was kept, and whose great gifts roused her mother's jealousy, grew to love all the qualities and virtues which spring without cultivation from Nature's own health and wealth. In her father's house she was from



childhood brought into contact with the most famous men of the day, who were amused and attracted by her quick repartee and surprising originality. The lively, marvellously intelligent child was her father's pride, and she returned his affection with a boundless love and admiration which lasted all her life and can be traced in most of her writings.

At fifteen years of age she began to write essays, novels, and tragedies. One of her tragedies, entitled *Montmorency*, marks the time when she began to feel attracted by the young Vicomte Mathieu de Montmorency, who had distinguished himself in the American War of Independence. Her parents being opposed to her marriage with a Catholic, she was obliged to refuse his hand, but to the end of their lives they remained faithful friends. Yielding to her mother's wishes, Germaine Necker married in 1786 the Swedish Ambassador in Paris, Baron Erik Magnus Staël Holstein, a favourite of Gustavus the Third. In order to assist him to this wealthy and influential connection, Gustavus confirmed the Baron in his post of ambassador in Paris for a certain number of years. The bridegroom, who was double the age of his bride, promised her parents that he would never take her to Sweden against her will. He seems to have been one of the charming noblemen of the period, a courtier with good manners, selfish, a spendthrift and extravagant. He had been the open favourite of Marie Antoinette, and it was she who persuaded the reluctant Gustavus III. to appoint him. Curiously enough at the outbreak of the Revolution his sympathies were with the liberals.

Mme. de Staël's first book, *Lettres sur Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, was published immediately before the Revolution. It is a panegyric and a defence. At the close of the third letter she seeks to interweave Rousseau's fame with that of her father, who, at the time she wrote, had just been called to the head of affairs; at the end of the fourth she hails the assembling of the States-General with youthful enthusiasm, and expresses the hope that the great French nation will attain by the path of enlightenment, reason, and peace, to the possession of those blessings which other peoples had gained by the shedding of streams of blood. She calls upon the nation to



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make it a matter of honour not to go beyond the point which all are united in regarding as their aim, and she closes with an apostrophe to Rousseau, in which she laments that he did not live long enough to see the approaching awe-inspiring spectacle, nor to encourage that patriot, Necker, who merited a judge, admirer, and fellow-citizen such as he.

The Revolution broke out, and would not be stayed in its career at what was the limit of her hopes and wishes, *i.e.* the acquisition of a constitution after the English pattern. Necker was soon compelled to flee, but his daughter remained in Paris, and, protected by her husband's position, rescued many an innocent victim of the Reign of Terror. With the assistance of the courageous German, Justus Erich Bollmann, she saved the life of the man who was her lover at that time, Narbonne, the former Minister of War. Bollmann got him safely to London in 1792.<sup>1</sup> She had even laid a plan for the flight of the royal family. The hatred of the revolutionary leaders was roused by her behaviour; and it was with difficulty she escaped the mob's thirst for revenge. She fled to Coppet, accompanied by her friend Montmorency, who, as an aristocrat, was also in danger, and who disguised himself as her lackey. Afterwards she went to England, where she published a pamphlet in defence of Marie Antoinette, whom she did not know personally, but by whose fate she had been deeply affected. This pamphlet was soon followed by another, also called forth by current events, entitled *De l'Influence des Passions sur le Bonheur des Individus et des Nations*, a piece of declamatory writing, in which the authoress exhibits no knowledge of life except when she treats of love, and no political acumen except when she is writing of the Revolution. There is a hollow, insincere ring in what she says on the subject of ambition.

Though not formally banished by the Directory, Mme. de Staël was placed under the surveillance of the police, and would have been arrested if she had entered France without permission. As soon, however, as Sweden had acknowledged the French Republic, she returned to Paris and busied herself actively with politics. Her aim was a Parliamentary

<sup>1</sup> Friedrich Kapp: "Justus Erich Bollmann."

constitution and peace with Europe. It was through her influence that Talleyrand was made Foreign Minister. Her house was a great political rendezvous, more especially of the Moderates, and it was not long before Benjamin Constant played the leading part among the politicians who assembled there, as well as occupied the first place in the good graces of the mistress of the house.

When Bonaparte came to Paris as a conqueror towards the end of 1797, after the campaign in Italy, he made an extraordinary impression upon Madame de Staël. She sought every opportunity of approaching him, felt herself alike attracted and overpowered by him. Whenever she tried to interest him, it seemed as if she were struck dumb, she, the incessant talker. The feeling of his unapproachableness tortured her. There is no doubt that for a short time she nourished the hope of becoming the friend of this Cæsar, and it was a grievous disappointment to have to relinquish the idea. From the moment she did so, she joined the ranks of his political adversaries, continuing, however, for a time to display a sort of coquetry as far as he was personally concerned. Not till she was definitely repulsed, did her feeling change to pure hatred. In the book which she published in the intermediate stage, we have satirical allusions to Bonaparte's government along with flattering allusions to himself personally. In conversation she openly and constantly expressed her desire that he (and consequently the army of her country under his command) might suffer defeat, in order that a stop might be put to his tyranny.

It was in the year 1800 that she published her first large book, *De la Littérature, considérée dans ses Rapports avec les Institutions Sociales*, a work which, from its general purport, must be classified as belonging to that great body of writings in which, ever since the days of the Renaissance, the relative merits of ancient and modern literature have been discussed. Chateaubriand dealt with the same problem very soon afterwards in his *Génie du Christianisme*. Mme. de Staël and he both declare themselves in favour of the modern literatures, but upon different grounds. He bases their superiority upon the fact that they deal with Christian themes, of which the

ancient authors had no knowledge ; Mme. de Staël bases it upon progressing civilisation. She believes in the capacity of humanity to improve, and in the gradual perfecting of social institutions, and on this belief grounds her assurance that literature will contain a steadily increasing treasure of experience and insight. At this stage of her development there is no question of any profound and systematic literary psychology ; she calmly, for instance, excludes imagination from the list of faculties which are capable of development—why ?—because in spite of all her enthusiasm for Ossian, she cannot deny that Homer's is the fuller, richer, poetry. The merit of her book, however, does not depend upon what it proves, but upon what it proclaims and urges, namely the necessity for a new literature, new science, and a new religion. She draws attention to the literatures of England and Germany, to the Icelandic sagas, and the old Scandinavian epics ; but Ossian is to her the great type of all that is splendid in the poetry of the North. She loves his seriousness and melancholy, for, she says, "melancholy poetry is the poetry which accords best with philosophy."<sup>1</sup> Writing of the Germans, she remarks : "The most important book the Germans possess, and the only one that can compare with the masterpieces of other languages, is *Werther*. Because it calls itself a novel, many do not realise that it is a truly great work. . . . The author of *Werther* has been reproached for making his hero suffer from other sorrows besides those of love, for allowing him to be made so unhappy by a humiliation, and so resentful by the social inequalities which were the cause of the humiliation ; but to my mind the author shows his genius in this quite as much as in anything else in the book."

The fundamental idea of her book is, that free social conditions must inevitably lead to a new development of literature, that it would be absurd if a society which had won political liberty for itself were to own only a literature shackled by rules. "Oh, if we could but find," she cries with youthful ardour, "a system of philosophy, an enthusiasm for all that is good, a strong and righteous code of laws,

<sup>1</sup> *De la Littérature*, p. 257. Paris, 1820.

which should be to us what the Christian religion has been to the past!"

Jealous of her growing fame, and on the alert as the champion of religion, Chateaubriand reviewed her book. Other critics had twitted her with her enthusiasm for everything melancholy, and had inquired what she thought of the Greeks, who were certainly not melancholy. Chateaubriand seized the opportunity to strike a blow on behalf of revealed religion. "Mme. de Staël," he says, "attributes that to philosophy which I attribute to religion"; and addressing her, he continues: "Your talent is but half developed; it is smothered by philosophy. You seem to be unhappy, and how, indeed, should philosophy heal the sorrow of your soul? Is it possible to fertilise one desert by means of another desert?" He exhausts himself in mere phrases.

It was about this time that antagonism to Bonaparte, who was soon to banish her again, this time for ten years, became the ruling idea in Mme. de Staël's life. After the Italian campaign she had seen in him the champion of freedom, had written him enthusiastic letters, and had prevailed upon him to erase her father's name from the list of exiles. But in the First Consul she saw only "a Robespierre on horseback," and Bonaparte complained with reason that she inflamed men's minds against him.

Her former enthusiasm had turned into passionate hatred. From her salon she carried on a regular war against him. She and Constant were unwearied in their satire of his associates, his person, his behaviour. She scoffed at his little body and big head, at his arrogance and his awkwardness. He was the *bourgeois gentilhomme* on the throne, annoyed by the wit of cultivated women, incapable of expressing himself coherently, eloquent only when abusive. His genius was mere charlatanism. He was not even a great general, for at Marengo he had lost his head, and might have lost the battle if Desaix had not come to his aid. There was something essentially vulgar about the man, which even his tremendous power of imagination could not always conceal.

She entered into all sorts of intrigues with the generals

who were opposed to Bonaparte, either from principle, like Moreau, or from pure envy, like Bernadotte. So far did she carry her hatred, that she was beside herself with rage when she heard of the humiliation of England by the Peace of Amiens, and kept away from Paris at the time of the festivities held in honour of this peace.

The foreign diplomatists in Paris, to use Madame de Staël's own words, "spent their lives with her." She conversed every day with numbers of influential people, conversation being her greatest pleasure; and Bonaparte is reported to have said that every one thought less of him after having talked with her. He sent to inquire what it was she really wanted, and if she would be satisfied if he paid her the two millions which Necker had given in trust to the Treasury, and which were being wrongfully kept back; she only answered that it was not a question of what she wanted, but of what she thought. From the day when Benjamin Constant first raised his voice in the Tribune against one of Bonaparte's proposals, her house in Paris was deserted, and all her invitations were declined; and immediately after the publication of her father's book, *Les dernières Vues de Politique et de Finances*, she was banished from Paris by express command of the First Consul.

No heavier blow could have fallen upon Mme. de Staël. She herself likened the sentence to one of death; for to her, who only really lived when she was in the capital, and who could so ill dispense with friends, intellectual intercourse, and a certain participation in the great events of the day, it was misery to be thus torn from home and country. "Every step the post-horses took caused me suffering, and when the postillions inquired if they had not done well, I could not refrain from bursting into tears at the thought of the sorry service they had rendered me."<sup>1</sup> She was accompanied by Benjamin Constant; but when she heard of her husband's illness she went to him, and nursed him till he died.

In the following year, 1803, she published *Delphine*, a tale written in five parts and in the form of letters, after

<sup>1</sup> *Dix Années d'Exil*, 1820, p. 84.



the pattern of *La Nouvelle Héloïse*. It is easy to trace the personal impressions and reminiscences which form the groundwork of this novel. The story is the story of a woman's dutiful renunciation of a happy marriage, and for this the authoress's own refusal of Montmorency supplied a background of fact. But the real theme of the book is the loving woman's conflict with society, and the cruel, cold destruction by society of the happiness of the individual. Looking at it in this light, we feel that it was the fresh impressions of her later years, her relations with her husband and Benjamin Constant, that gave the book its tone. Her reputation had been injured by her separation from her husband, her relations with Constant were no secret, and he was undoubtedly the father of her daughter Albertine, born in 1797, the future Duchesse de Broglie. When Mme. de Staël wrote *Delphine* it had never occurred to her to doubt that Constant would legitimise this daughter by a speedy marriage; but, in spite of the great allowance always made by public opinion for people of wealth and position, and her consequent comparative independence of action, she bitterly felt both the covert persecution of slander and the deliberate attempts at defamation made by the pharisaical.

The spiritless, resigned motto of *Delphine*: "A man should be able to defy public opinion, a woman to submit to it," almost betrays its authoress, Madame de Staël's mother. The actual story harmonises with the motto, but the spirit of the book and the very fact of its publication contradict it. For the book is a justification of divorce, and it appeared in the same year that Napoleon concluded the Concordat with the Pope; it attacked indissoluble wedlock and the religious sacrament of marriage, at the very moment when the marriage laws were being made more stringent, and a portion of its old power was being restored to the Church.

The book answers to its motto in so far that it teaches, through the fate of its heroine, that if a woman, even after a generous and prolonged sacrifice of her own well-being, transgress the rules of society, though it may be only to

prevent the ruin of her lover, she is lost. It contradicts its motto in so far that the crying injustice of such a fate speaks more powerfully than any declamation, of the imperfection of the social organism and of the preposterousness of that power to coerce and make unhappy, which man's short-sightedness and pusillanimity have entrusted to the antiquated institutions under the pressure of which Delphine is crushed. She is depicted from the very first as a superior being, pure, benevolent, spirited, elevated by the very fact of her purity above the pharisaical morality of society. Her character is nowhere more charmingly suggested than in the scene where an unfortunate and maligned woman enters the salon of the Tuileries, and the other ladies immediately rise from their seats and move away, leaving a great open space round the poor, marked creature; upon which Delphine walks across the room and seats herself by her at whom all the other women have vied in casting the first stone.

By a series of astoundingly base devices and intrigues, one of the principal characters of the book, a female Talleyrand, succeeds in separating Delphine from her lover, and uniting him to her antipodes, the cold, orthodoxly pious Mathilde, who privately accepts from the deserted Delphine the enormous dowry without which the marriage cannot be arranged. By the time all the various deceptions are detected, the totally unsuitable, unnatural pair, Mathilde and Léonce, are united. Other equally odious marriages and equally unhappy love affairs are grouped round this central couple, in order that the main idea of the book may be made sufficiently clear. Henri de Lebensei, who is an embellished edition of Constant, cannot be united to the woman he loves until she has obtained a divorce from her husband, with whom she cannot live, she declares, without destroying all that is good and noble in her nature. M. de Serbellane stands in the same hopeless position to Thérèse d'Ervins as Delphine does to Mathilde's husband.

Delphine is represented as of so pure and self-sacrificing a nature that she not only peremptorily rejects the idea of a

union with Léonce, which would necessarily destroy his wife's happiness, but will not permit him to dwell upon the thought. She calms him ; she points him to a profounder morality and religion than that in which he, as a child of the eighteenth century, has been brought up : " Léonce, I did not expect to find such an indifference to religious ideas in you. I take it upon me to reproach you for it. Your morality is only based upon honour ; you would have been much happier if you had given your homage to those simple and true principles which teach us to submit our actions to the dictates of our conscience, and free us from all other yokes. You know that my education, far from enslaving my mind, has made it if anything too independent. It is possible that superstition is as yet more suitable for a woman than freedom of thought ; weak and wavering beings that we are, we need support on every side, and love is a kind of credulity which is perhaps apt to ally itself with all the other kinds of credulity and superstition. But the noble guardian of my youth esteemed my character sufficiently to wish to develop my reason, and never did he require of me to accept any opinion without examining into it. I can therefore speak to you of the religion I love, as I can speak on any other subject which my heart and mind have freely tested, and you cannot attribute what I say to you to inculcated habit or the unweighed impressions of childhood. . . . Do not, Léonce, refuse the comfort which is offered to us by natural religion." We distinguish an echo of Rousseau, and the influence of the reaction against Voltaire, in this sermon which Necker's daughter places in the mouth of her second self.

The plot develops ; soon it becomes impossible any longer to maintain the unnatural union, to endure the unnatural misery. Henri de Lebensei writes the letter advising a divorce, which brought ill-fortune to the book, and which fell like a firebrand into the clerical camp. He writes to Delphine : " The man you love is worthy of you, madame, but neither his nor your feeling is of any avail to alter the situation in which an unhappy destiny has placed you. One thing alone can restore your reputation and procure

your happiness. Collect all your strength to hear me. Léonce is not irrevocably bound to Mathilde; he can still become your husband; in a month from now divorce will be legalised by the Legislative Assembly." We must remember that the book appeared just at the time of the reinstitution of Catholic marriage in France.

Here are more extracts from his letter: "You, who reprobate divorce, believe your view to be the more moral. If it were so, it ought to be the view taken by all sincere thinkers; for the first aim of thinking man is to determine his duties to their full extent. But let us go into the matter together; let us inquire whether the principles which induce me to approve of divorce do not harmonise with the nature of man and with the beneficent intentions which we ought to attribute to the Divinity. The indissolubility of unhappy marriages makes life one long succession of hopeless miseries. Some men say, indeed, that it is only necessary to repress youthful inclinations, but they forget that the repressed inclinations of youth become the lasting griefs of age. I do not deny all the disadvantages connected with divorce, or rather, the imperfections of human nature which make divorce necessary; but in a civilised society which urges nothing against marriages of convenience, or against marriages at an age when it is impossible to foretell the future, a society whose law can neither punish the parents who misuse their authority, nor the husband or wife who behaves badly—in such a society the law which prohibits divorce is only harsh towards the victims whose fetters it takes upon itself to rivet more firmly, without in the least affecting the circumstances which make these fetters easy or terrible to bear. It seems to say: 'I cannot ensure your happiness, but I can at least vouch for the continuance of your unhappiness.'"

In such involved and eloquent periods is couched what has been called Mme. de Staël's attack upon marriage. In reality it is, as we see, only an attack upon the binding, oppressing power with which society (itself first moulded into shape by the Church in the days when the Church was the only spiritual power) has invested the first attachment of

youth—in Catholic countries by legislation, in Protestant by means of public opinion, which metes out as stern justice as any marriage laws. Her argument is based on the assumption that marriage can only be considered that which it is maintained to be, namely an ideally moral relation, when the two beings, who at a given moment of their lives promise to live together and be faithful to one another for the rest of their days, really know and love one another, and she points out how exceedingly difficult it is for any human being thoroughly to know himself and another human being. If marriage requires this mutual knowledge as its foundation, then a union in which it is lacking is not marriage. What kind of life can be based upon a sudden fancy, or upon a lie, or upon a Yes wrung from a woman by fear? In every case in which marriage does not rest upon a better foundation, its sanctity is imaginary, is derived from a confusion of the real relation with the ideal.

Delphine does not allow herself to be persuaded. Faithful to the motto of the book, that a woman must bow to public opinion, she even determines to place another obstacle between herself and Léonce. By the time his wife dies, Delphine has taken the veil. Once more, though in another form, we have strong opposition to a vow generally regarded as sacred. Again it is Henri who is spokesman, but this time he appeals to Léonce: "Are you able to listen to bold, salutary advice, the following of which would save you from an abyss of misery? Are you capable of taking a step which would offend what you have been accustomed all your life to defer to, public opinion and established custom, but which would be consonant with morality, reason, and humanity? I was born a Protestant, and have, I grant, not been brought up in awe of those insane and barbarous institutions of society which demand of so many innocent beings the sacrifice of all natural inclinations; but ought you to have less confidence in my judgment because it is uninfluenced by prejudice? A proud and high-minded man should only obey the dictates of universal morality. Of what signification are those duties which are merely the outcome of accidental circumstances, and depend upon the

caprices of law or the will of a priest? duties that subject a man's conscience to the judgment of other men, of men, too, who have long bent their necks under the yoke of the prejudices and self-interest of their order? The laws of France will release Delphine from the vows unhappy circumstances have forced from her. Come and live with her upon our native soil! What is it that keeps you apart? A vow she has made to God? Believe me, the Supreme Being knows our nature too well ever to accept irrevocable vows from us. Possibly something in your heart rebels against profiting by laws which are the outcome of a Revolution to which you are antagonistic? My friend, this Revolution, which has unfortunately been soiled by so many violent deeds, will be extolled by posterity because of the freedom it has bestowed upon France. If it is followed only by fresh forms of slavery, this period of slavery will be the most ignominious period in the history of the world; but if freedom is its result, then happiness, honour, virtue, all that is noble in humanity, is so inseparably bound up with freedom, that centuries to come will be lenient in their judgment of the events which prepared the way for the age of freedom."

Besides attacking to this extent certain definite social institutions, the book makes protest throughout against the great mass of received opinions, the prejudices with which most men are clad as it were in a coat of triple mail, the beliefs which must not even be approached, because the very ground around them is holy within a circumference of so and so many square miles. It cannot be too plainly asserted that, in this particular, *Delphine* is a more vigorous, remarkable work than most of the other productions of the Emigrant Literature. For a nation has a literature in order that its horizon may be widened and its theories of life confronted with life. In his early youth society offers the individual an extraordinary, patched-together suit of prejudices which it expects him to wear. "Am I really obliged," asks the man, "to wear this tattered cloak? Can I not dispense with these old rags? Is it absolutely necessary for me either to blacken my face or hide it under this sheep's mask? Am I compelled to swear that

Polichinelle has no hump, to believe that Pierrot is an eminently honourable, and Harlequin a particularly serious man? May I not look up into any of their faces, or write on any hand, 'I know you, fair mask!'? Is there no help?" There is no help, unless you are prepared to be beaten by Polichinelle, kicked by Pierrot, and whacked by Harlequin. But literature is, or should be, the territory where officialism ceases, established customs are disregarded, masks are torn off, and that terrible thing, the truth, is told.

*Delphine* met with much disapprobation. The most famous critic of the day wrote: "One cannot conceive more dangerous and immoral doctrines than those which are disseminated by this book. The authoress would seem to have forgotten the ideas with which she, as Necker's daughter, was brought up. Regardless of the Protestant faith of her family, she expresses her contempt for revealed religion; and in this pernicious book, which, it must be confessed, is written with no small ability, she presents us with a long vindication of divorce. *Delphine* speaks of love like a Bacchante, of God like a Quakeress, of death like a grenadier, and of morality like a sophist." High-sounding words these, but just the high-sounding words which the future must always listen to from the toothless past, whose heavy artillery is charged to the muzzle with the wet powder of orthodox belief and the paper balls of narrow-mindedness.

Whereas Mme. de Staël's contemporaries lavishly praised the style of the book and the literary ability of its authoress, in order to be the better able to reprobate her views of life and her aims, the modern critic has little to say for the loose and diffuse style which the novel has in common with almost all others written in the form of letters; but, as regards the ideas of the book, they hold good to-day; they have actually not yet penetrated into all the countries of Europe, although the present century has striven to realise them ever more and more fully.

The breach between society and the individual depicted in *Delphine* is entirely in the spirit of the Emigrant Literature. The same bold revolt followed by the same despair in view of the uselessness of the struggle, is to be found throughout

the whole group of writings. In the present case the revolt is a spirited, desperate attempt to hold fast one of the gains of the Revolution at the moment when it is being wrested away by the reaction. The despair is due to the sorrowful feeling that no remonstrance will avail, that the retrograde movement must run its course, must exceed all reasonable limits, before a better condition of things can be looked for. Was a woman's novel likely to prevail against an autocrat's compact with a Pope!

The "war with society" which she depicts is less a conflict with the state or the law than with the jumble of conventions and beliefs, old and new, artificial and natural, reasonable and unreasonable, hurtful and beneficial, which, fused together into a cohesive and apparently homogeneous mass, constitute the stuff whereof public opinion is made. Just as the so-called sound common sense, which is always ready to set itself in opposition to any new philosophy, is at any given time to a great extent simply the congealed remains of a philosophy of earlier date, so the rules of society and the verdicts pronounced by society in accordance with these rules, verdicts always unfavourable in the case of new ideas, are to a great extent founded upon ideas which in their day had a hard struggle to assert themselves in face of the opposition of the then prevailing public opinion. That which was once an original, living idea, stiffens in time into the corpse of an idea. Social laws are universal laws, the same for all, and, like everything that is universal, they in numberless cases victimise. No matter how singular the individual may be, he is treated like every one else. The genius is in much the position of the clever head-boy in a stupid class; he has to listen to the same old lessons over and over again because of the dunces who have not learned them and yet must learn them. The verdict of society is an irresponsible verdict; while the judgments of the individual, as such, must always to a certain extent be a natural product, those of society are in most cases a manufactured article, provided wholesale by those whose business it is to concoct public opinion; and no responsibility is felt by the individual in giving his adherence



to them. The natural course would be for the individual to form his own views and principles, make his own rules of conduct, and, according to his powers, search for the truth with his own brains ; but instead of this, in modern society the individual finds a ready-made religion, a different one in each country, the religion of his parents, with which he is inoculated long before he is capable of religious thought or feeling. The result is that his religion-producing powers are nipped in the bud, or if they are not, then woe be to him ! His essays are a gauntlet flung in the face of society. And in the same way all originality of moral feeling is, in the majority of men, crushed or checked by the ready-made moral code of society and ready-made public opinion. The verdicts of society, which are the outcome of all the pious and moral doctrines accepted by it on trust, are necessarily untrustworthy, often extremely narrow-minded, not infrequently cruel.

It was Mme. de Staël's lot to be brought face to face with more prejudices than the generality of authors are. She was a Protestant in a Catholic country, and in sympathy with Catholics although brought up in a Protestant family. In France she was the daughter of a Swiss citizen, and in Switzerland she felt herself a Parisian. As a woman of intellect and strong passions, she was predestined to collision with public opinion, as the authoress, the woman of genius, to war, offensive and defensive, with a social order which relegates woman to the sphere of private life. But that she saw through the prejudices by which she was surrounded, more clearly than did any other contemporary writer, was principally due to the fact that, as a political refugee, she was obliged to travel in one foreign country after another ; this gave her ever-active, inquiring mind the opportunity of comparing the spirit and the ideals of one people with those of another.

## IX

### EXILE

WHEN the edict banishing Mme. de Staël from Paris was made known to her, she inquired through Joseph Bonaparte, who was among the number of her friends, whether she would be permitted to travel in Germany or would be brought back from there. After some delay a passport was sent her, and she set out for Weimar. There she made the acquaintance of the ducal family, had long conversations with Schiller on the reciprocal relations of French and German literature, and pestered Goethe with questions upon every subject in heaven and earth. The eager discussion of problematical questions was, he says, her special passion. But what surprised both Goethe and the other German celebrities most was, that she not only wished to make their acquaintance, but to influence affairs generally; she always talked as if the moment for action had come, and they must all be up and doing. She went on from Weimar to Berlin, made acquaintance with Prince Louis Ferdinand, was taken up by the Fichte, Jacobi, and Henriette Herz circles, and carried off A. W. Schlegel as tutor to her children.

The following year she travelled in Italy, studied its ancient monuments, its art, the southern manners and customs of its people, and absorbed impressions of Italian nature at every pore. Then she returned to Coppet and wrote *Corinne, ou l'Italie*.

Her longing for France, however, gave her no peace. She had been forbidden to come within forty leagues of Paris, but she took up her abode just outside that limit, first at Auxerre, then at Rouen. (Theprefect of this latter town was suspended for having shown her some courteous attention.)

She eventually received permission to superintend the publishing of *Corinne* from a country house only twelve leagues from Paris. But the book was barely published before a new edict banished her from France altogether. *Corinne* was a grand success, and Napoleon could not endure any success in which he had no share. Mme. de Staël returned to Coppet, and, like the Emperor, continued to extend her realm. It grew as her emotional nature expanded, her intellectual grasp widened, and the number of her friendships increased. She held a regular court at Coppet. Remarkable men from all parts of Europe gathered round her there. In her house were to be met statesmen like Constant—whom in her infatuation she calls the cleverest man in the world—historians like Sismondi, poets like Zacharias Werner and Oehlenschläger, German princes, Polish princes and princesses, the flower of the aristocracy of birth and of intellect. Since her visit to Germany she had steadily continued to study the German language and literature, but she found that it would be necessary for her to make another sojourn in that country if she desired to present to her countrymen a complete picture of the new world which had revealed itself to her. She had been in North Germany, now she spent a year in Vienna, and upon her return to Switzerland set to work upon her great three-volume book, *De l'Allemagne*. It was completed in 1810. The next thing was to get it published in Paris.

A law had been passed which forbade the publication of any book until it had been approved of by the Censors; on this followed another regulation, specially aimed at Mme. de Staël, which gave the Chief of the Police authority to suppress a book if he saw fit, even though it had been published with the approval of the Censors. This was a law which did away with all law. Having again received permission to take up her abode at a distance of forty leagues from Paris to superintend the publication of her book, Mme. de Staël went to Blois, lived first at the château of Chaumont-sur-Loire, then at Fossé, and afterwards at the country-houses of friends in the neighbourhood; she fluttered round her beloved Paris at the required dis-

tance, as a moth flutters round a candle. Once she even ventured into the capital. Meanwhile the Censors examined her book, corrected, deleted, and gave the mangled remains their *imprimatur*. Ten thousand copies were printed. But on the day on which they were to be issued, the Chief of the Police sent his gendarmes into the publisher's shop, after placing a sentinel at every exit, and, by order of the Government, performed the heroic feat of hacking the ten thousand copies to pieces. The mass was kneaded into a dough, and the publisher received twenty louis d'or in compensation. Mme. de Staël was at the same time ordered to deliver up her manuscript (representing the labours and hopes of six years) and to leave France in the course of twenty-four hours. In the letter which she received from the Chief of the Police on this occasion occur the following sentences: "You are not to seek the reason of the command I have communicated to you in your omission of all reference to the Emperor in your last work; that would be a mistake; no place could be found for him in it that would be worthy of him: your banishment is the natural consequence of the course you have persistently pursued for some years past. It appears to me that the air of this country does not suit you; as for us, we are, fortunately, not yet reduced to seeking models amongst the people you so much admire. Your last work is not French."

That was what doomed her—it was *not French*. And to think that it was the epoch-making book, *De l'Allemagne*, epoch-making in French literature, because, not accidentally but on principle, it broke with all antiquated literary traditions and indicated new sources of life—to think that it was this book which the spiritual policeman of the nation presumed to condemn as *not French*! And the cruelly ironical attempt to assume a tone of gallantry! "It appears to me that the air of this country does not suit you"—therefore be kind enough to betake yourself elsewhere! We seem to hear the intoxicated vanity of France itself speak: "Because you have ventured to love liberty even now, when the rest of us are happy under tyranny; because, whilst we have been sunning ourselves in the beams of Napoleon's

glory, you have dared to depict in *Corinne* the sovereign independence of genius, and, yourself banished from Paris, have crowned your ideal at the Capitol; because, at the moment when the eagles of France are shining resplendent with the glory of a thousand victories, and foreign nations have become our lieges, you, a weak woman, have had the audacity to represent to us our sources of spiritual life as almost dried up, and to point us to the despised Germany as a land whose poetry far outshines our own, to hated England, perfidious Albion, as a country whose love of liberty is more persistent and genuine than ours, and to dying Italy, the subjugated province of France, as a country whose simple manners and customs and vast superiority in art are worthy of imitation—because of all these things, you shall be stigmatised as unpatriotic, the cockade of your country shall be torn from your brow, your books shall be destroyed, even your manuscripts shall be torn into fragments, and you yourself, with a couple of spies at your heels, shall be chased like a wild animal across the frontier of France before twenty-four hours have passed."

The Prefect of the department was sent to demand the manuscript of the book; Mme. de Staël succeeded in saving it by giving him a rough copy. But anxiety about her book was for the moment the least of her anxieties. She had hoped to cross to England, but, expressly to prevent this, the Chief of the Police had added a postscript to his letter, forbidding her to embark at any northern port. She was half inclined to sail in a French ship bound for America, on the chance of the ship being captured by the English, but abandoned this plan as too adventurous. Despondent and sorrowful, she retired once more to Coppet.

Here fresh persecutions of every description awaited her. The Prefect of Geneva, on the strength of the first order he received, gave her two sons to understand that they also were forbidden ever to return to France, and this merely because they had made a fruitless attempt to obtain an audience of Napoleon on behalf of their mother. A few days later Mme. de Staël received a letter from the Prefect,

in which he, in the name of the Chief of the Police, demanded the proof-sheets of her book on Germany. It had been ascertained by means of spies that the proofs must be in existence, and the French Government had no intention of resting contented with half measures, with the destruction of the printed book; the work was to be completely annihilated, any future edition of it made impossible. The authoress replied that the proofs had already been sent abroad, but that she would willingly promise never again to print any of her works on the Continent of Europe. "There was no great merit in such a promise," she remarks in her *Dix Années d'Exil*, "for of course no Continental government would have sanctioned the publication of a book which had been interdicted by Napoleon." Not long after this, the Prefect of Geneva, Barante, the father of the historian, was banished for having shown too great leniency towards Mme. de Staël. Her son falling ill, Mme. de Staël accompanied him by the advice of the doctors to the baths of Aix in Savoy, some twenty leagues from Coppet. Scarcely had she arrived there when she received, by special messenger, an intimation from the Prefect of the Department of Mont Blanc that she was not only forbidden to leave Switzerland on any pretext whatever, but even to travel in Switzerland itself; two leagues from Coppet was indicated as the distance beyond which she might not go. Not satisfied with transforming her sojourn upon her own estate into an imprisonment, the Government took care that she should suffer not only from the loss of freedom, but from that special curse of prison life, solitude—doubly painful to one of her peculiarly social disposition. Schlegel, who had lived in her house as tutor to her children for eight years, was ordered to leave, on the foolish pretext that he influenced her against France. To the inquiry how he did this, the answer was returned, that in the comparison which he, as literary critic, had instituted between Racine's Phèdre and the Phædra of Euripides, he had pronounced himself in favour of the latter. Montmorency was exiled for having spent a few days at Coppet, and Mme. Récamier, whom Mme. de Staël had not time to warn of the punishment

attending even a brief visit, was forbidden to return to France, because on her way through Switzerland she had gone to cheer her old friend with a little conversation. Even a man of seventy-eight, St.-Priest, an old ministerial colleague of her father's, was exiled for having paid a polite call at Coppet.

The isolation which is the lot of those who set themselves in opposition to despotic power was not new to her. For long no man of rank or fame, no politician who wished to stand well with the Government, had dared to visit her at Coppet. They were all prevented by business or illness. "Ah!" she said once, "how weary I am of all this cowardice which calls itself consumption!" But now, to the pain of seeing herself abandoned by so many former friends was added that of seeing her real friends punished with exile for the slightest expression of good-will towards her. She complained that she spread misfortune round her like an infectious disease.

It stood in her power even now, after years of exile, persecution, and practical imprisonment, to obtain liberty, and permission once more to write and publish; it was privately intimated to her that a slight change of opinion or attitude would procure her the right to return to France; but she would not purchase liberty at this price. And when it was said to her later in more definite terms: "Speak or write one little word about the King of Rome, and all the capitals of Europe will be open to you;" all she replied was: "I wish him a good nurse."

Isolated and closely confined, she came to the decision to make a determined attempt to escape from Coppet. It was her desire to go to America, but that was impossible without a passport, and how was she to procure one? She feared, besides, that she might be arrested on her way to the port she must sail from, on the pretext that she intended to go to England, which was forbidden her under penalty of imprisonment. And she was well aware that when the first scandal had blown over, there would be nothing to prevent the Government quietly leaving her in prison; she would soon be completely forgotten. She contemplated the

possibility of reaching Sweden by way of Russia, the whole of North Germany being under the control of the French. She believed she could manage to escape through the Tyrol without being delivered up by Austria, but a passport to Russia must be procured from St. Petersburg, and she feared that if she wrote for this from Coppet, she might be denounced to the French Ambassador ; she must get to Vienna first and write from there. For six months she pored over the map of Europe, studying it to find a way of escape as eagerly as Napoleon studied it to find the paths by which he was to proceed on his conquest of the world. When, after a month's delay, a last petition for a passport to America was refused (although Mme. de Staël had pledged herself, if it were granted, to publish nothing there), the weak, brave woman determined upon a decisive attempt to escape. One day in 1812, she and her daughter drove away from Coppet, with their fans in their hands, and not a single box or package in the carriage. They arrived safely at Vienna, and wrote to St. Petersburg for Russian passports. But the Austrian Government was so anxious to avoid complications with France that Mme. de Staël was detained upon the frontier of Galicia, and was followed by spies through the whole of Austrian Poland. When she stopped on her journey to spend a single day at Prince Lubomirski's, the Prince was obliged to give an Austrian detective a seat at his table, and it was only by threats that Mme. de Staël's son prevented the man taking up his position at night in her bedroom. Not till she had passed the Russian frontier did she breathe freely again. But the feeling of freedom did not last long, for she had barely reached Moscow before rumours that the French army was approaching the city compelled her to take flight again, and it was not until she reached St. Petersburg that she could consider herself in safety.

The year before her flight from Coppet, Mme. de Staël, then forty-five years of age, had been privately married to a young French officer of twenty-three, Albert de Rocca, who had been severely wounded, and had come to Switzerland a complete invalid, exhausted by loss of blood. The sympathy which Mme. de Staël showed him roused a passionate



devotion in the young soldier, and this led to a secret union. Rocca joined Mme. de Staël upon the Russian frontier.

Her intention was to travel to Constantinople and Greece, in search of the correct local colouring for a poem she was planning on Richard Cœur de Lion. Reading Byron seems to have inspired her with the idea of this poem, which was, she said, to be a *Lara*, though not a reflection of Byron's. The fear, however, that the fatigues of the journey might be too great for her young daughter and De Rocca, decided her to go to Stockholm instead. There she renewed her friendship with Bernadotte and met her old friend, Schlegel, whom Bernadotte had made a Swedish noble and his own private secretary. Through Schlegel, Bernadotte also made the acquaintance of Constant, whom he created a Knight of the Northern Star, and whom he vainly attempted to persuade into concurrence in his ambitious designs on the French throne. As far as Bernadotte's character was concerned, Mme. de Staël was less keen-sighted than Constant; she always speaks of him with warmth; their common hatred of Napoleon was, doubtless, a bond of union. In her case it became a dumb hatred from the moment that the allied armies marched against France. She laments the necessity of wishing Napoleon success, but she can no longer separate his interests from those of France. Possessed of more strength of character than Constant, she rejected the overtures made to her by Napoleon during the Hundred Days. She survived his final downfall, and saw with sorrow the return of the Bourbons, more virulent enemies of freedom than the autocrat they displaced. She foregathered once more with Constant in Paris in 1816; and in the following year she died.

This brief summary of the life of a remarkable woman and of the life-conflict of her maturer years, is a sufficient groundwork for the elaboration of a complete picture of her character as a woman and a writer. Innate warmth of heart and intelligence were her original gifts; her warm-heartedness developed into broad-minded philanthropy, and her intelligence into a power of receptivity and reproduction which was akin to genius.

She possessed in a marked degree several of the characteristics of the eighteenth century—sociability, for instance, and love of conversation accompanied by remarkable conversational powers. Whereas George Sand, the great authoress of the nineteenth century, was reserved and silent in company, and only revealed her inner self when she wrote, Mme. de Staël was a lively improvisatrice. She possessed the gift of electrifying; her words shed a stream of light upon the subject of which she spoke. All who knew her personally said that her books were as nothing in comparison with her conversation. One of her critics ends a review thus: "When one listens to her, it is impossible not to agree with her; if she had said all this instead of writing it, I should not have been able to criticise;" and a great lady said jestingly: "If I were Queen I should command Mme. de Staël to talk to me constantly." The countless sayings which have been preserved give us, in spite of the chilling influence of print, some idea of the sparkle and originality of her conversation. One day when she was discoursing on the unnaturalness of parents arranging marriages instead of doing the only right thing, allowing the young girl to choose for herself, she cried laughingly: "I shall *compel* my daughter to marry for love." One of Napoleon's friends having informed her that the Emperor would pay her the two millions her father had entrusted to the Bank of France if he were certain of her attachment, she replied: "I knew that a certificate of birth would be required before I could obtain my money, but I did not expect to be asked for a declaration of love."

But behind the ready wit and the facility of expression which are the qualities developed by a social age, lay much of the fervour and the soul which the nineteenth century has not failed to appreciate. The much admired châtelaine of Coppet, the fêted, fascinating leader of society, was a genuine, natural woman. The want of sympathy between her and her mother had, as already noted, early strengthened her tendency to believe in and love human nature. The idea of duty as conflicting with nature rather than guiding it was repulsive to her. In her work *De l'Influence des Passions*, she considers the passions in their relation, not to the idea of

duty, but to the idea of happiness, investigating into the proportionate infringement of each upon our happiness. In *Corinne* she says: "Nothing is easier than to make a grand pretence of morality while condemning all that is noble and great. The idea of duty . . . can be turned into a weapon of offence, which the mediocre, perfectly satisfied with their mediocrity and narrow-mindedness, employ to impose silence upon the gifted, and to rid themselves of enthusiasm, of genius, in short, of all their enemies."

The temperamental foundation upon which Mme. de Staël built was genuinely feminine. The final ideal of this undeniably ambitious woman was a purely personal, purely idyllic one—happiness in love. It is upon this that her two great novels, *Delphine* and *Corinne*, turn; the improbability of finding it in marriage as ordained by society, and the impossibility of finding it outside marriage, are her fundamental ideas; and the perpetual conflict between domestic happiness and noble ambitions or free love, is merely the expression of her constant complaint, that neither genius nor passion is compatible with that domestic happiness which is her heart's eternal desire. In her books the woman only seeks the path of fame when she has been disappointed in all her dearest hopes. To Mme. de Staël the heart is everything; even fame was to her only a means of conquering hearts. *Corinne* says: "When I sought glory, I always had the hope that it would make people love me," and Mme. de Staël herself exclaims: "Do not let us give our unjust enemies and our ungrateful friends the triumph of crushing, of suppressing our powers. It is they who force those who would so willingly have been content with feeling, to seek fame."

It is this warm-heartedness, one might almost say motherliness, which, in her case, gives the melancholy of the age a peculiar imprint. Hers is not only that universal human melancholy that arises from the certainty with which two human beings who love one another can say: "The day is coming when I shall lay you in the grave, or you me." Still less is it the egotistical despondency to be found in so many of the male writers of the day. It is a depression connected with the struggle for ideal equality and liberty of those

revolutionary times, it is the sadness of the enthusiastic reformer.

From her youth she had been such an enthusiast on the subject of equality that even in the matter of ability she regarded all men as essentially equal, assuming only the most trifling difference between the genius and the ordinary man. From the time she sat upon her father's knee she had cherished the strongest faith in the power of liberty to make men happy and to call forth all that is good in them, and her faith did not waver even on the September day when she was compelled to flee from that Reign of Terror which was the result of an experiment in equality, or when, under the Consulate, she was banished by the dictatorship into which liberty had resolved itself. But it is small wonder that a veil woven of sadness and despondency early dimmed the brightness of her spirit. At the close of a letter to Talleyrand, whom in the days of her power she had saved from banishment, but who was not sufficiently grateful to attempt to make her any return, she writes: "Farewell! Are you happy? with so superior an intellect do you not penetrate to what is at the core of everything—unhappiness?" And in *Corinne* the heroine repeats what Mme. de Staël herself often said: "Of all the capacities with which nature endowed me, the capacity of suffering is the only one I have developed to its full extent."

Healthy-minded as she was, she came in time to take a brighter view of life. A relative who knew her well writes: "Possibly there was a time when life, death, melancholy, and passionate self-sacrifice played too great a part in her conversation; but when these words spread like a contagion throughout her whole circle, and actually began to be heard amongst the servants, she took a deadly loathing to them."<sup>1</sup> She succeeded in advancing beyond the intellectual stage at which so many of her French contemporaries stopped short.

It is, indeed, one of the most noticeable things about her, this development of her critical faculty in the spirit

<sup>1</sup> Mme. Necker de Saussure: *Notice sur le Caractère et les Écrits de Mme. de Staël*, p. 358.

and direction of the nineteenth century. Originally she was a true Parisian, with no real appreciation of the beauties of nature. When, after her first flight from Paris, she saw the Lake of Geneva for the first time, she exclaimed in her home-sickness: "How much more beautiful were the gutters of the Rue du Bac!" Not many years later she described the scenery of Italy, in *Corinne*, in truly glowing language. In her earlier years she was in love with, infatuated with, Paris, which to her represented civilisation, yet it was she who first taught the Frenchman to appreciate the characteristic and the good qualities of the other European nations. For she possessed the true critical gift, that is, she had the power of steadily enlarging her mind, increasing her receptivity, and destroying her prejudices in the bud, thereby holding herself in constant preparedness to understand.

It is to this we must ascribe her marvellous power of attraction; and this explains how, banished and disgraced as she was, she enjoyed the power and influence of a queen at Coppet. Although our countryman Oehlenschläger does not seem to have had any clear appreciation of the real greatness of the woman whose guest he was, he gives a very charming description of Mme. de Staël and his visit to her in 1808. "How intellectual, witty, and amiable Mme. de Staël was," he says, "the whole world knows. I have never met a woman possessed of so much genius; but, probably on that very account, there was something masculine about her. She was square built, with marked features. Pretty she was not, but there was something most attractive in her bright brown eyes, and she possessed in a very high degree the womanly gift of winning, subtly ruling, and bringing together men of the most different characters. That in matters of the heart she was the true woman, she has shown us in *Delphine* and *Corinne*. Rousseau himself has not depicted love with more fire. Wherever she appeared she collected round her all the men of intellect, drawing them away even from young and beautiful women. When one remembers that in addition to all this she was very rich and very hospitable, giving magnificent entertainments every day, one does not marvel that, like some queen or fairy, she drew

men to her enchanted castle. One is almost tempted to believe that it was to indicate this dominion of hers that she always had a little leafy branch by her at meals, which she took in her hand and played with. The servants had to lay one beside her plate every day, for it was as necessary to her as knife, fork, and spoon."

Men made their way to Coppet, as some fifty years earlier they had made their way to the adjacent Ferney, where Voltaire, also an exile dwelling as close to the frontiers of France as possible, gathered the picked men of Europe round him in the last years of his life. One is irresistibly tempted to compare the influence which emanated from the aged man at Ferney with that exercised by the owner of Coppet. The years spent at Ferney are in every respect the most glorious period of Voltaire's life. It was from there that he, as the champion of justice and toleration, compassed achievements which no one could have believed to be within the power of a private individual whose only weapon was his pen.

Three years of his life at Ferney were devoted to litigation on behalf of Jean Calas. Calas was a merchant of Toulouse, aged sixty-eight, a Protestant. His youngest son had become converted to Catholicism, and was completely estranged from his family. The eldest son, a wild, dissipated young man, committed suicide. The Catholic clergy immediately spread a rumour among the people that the father had strangled his son out of hatred for the Romish faith, which the latter, it was said, had intended to embrace on the following day. The whole family was imprisoned. The suicide's corpse lay in state, and performed one miracle after another. The bi-centenary of the massacre of St. Bartholomew in Toulouse occurred at the time of the trial, and in their fanatical excitement, thirteen judges, despite all proofs of his innocence, and without a shadow of evidence of his guilt, condemned Calas to be broken on the wheel. The sentence was carried out, the old man protesting his innocence to the last. His children, under the pretext of a reprieve, were shut up in a monastery and forced to adopt the Catholic faith. Then Voltaire at Ferney wrote his cele-

brated treatise on tolerance, and moved heaven and earth to get the case tried over again. He appealed to the public opinion of the whole of Europe. He compelled the Council of State in Paris to demand the minutes of the trial from the Parliament of Toulouse. They were refused; there were delays of every kind; but in the end, after three years of unwearied fighting, Voltaire gained his point. The Toulouse sentence was pronounced unjust, the dead man's honour was cleared, and an indemnification was paid to his family. All who desire to be just to Voltaire ought to remember that it is during this period that the phrase, *Écrases l'infâme*, perpetually recurs in his letters.

It was at Ferney that Voltaire gave shelter to the Sirven family. The father was a Calvinist, but one of his daughters had been forced into a convent. Upon her becoming insane, she was released, whereupon she drowned herself in a well not far from her father's house. The father, mother, and sister are accused of murdering the nun, are tried, and all condemned to death. The unhappy family, knowing of no sanctuary in the whole of Europe except Voltaire's house, escape to Ferney, the mother dying of grief upon the way. Voltaire, the banished man, by his eloquence and his ardour compels the French courts to try this case also again, and the family is acquitted.

Three years later Étalonde found refuge at Ferney. Two young men, De la Barre and Étalonde, were accused in 1765 of having passed a church procession without taking off their hats, which was a true accusation, and of having thrown a crucifix into the water, which was a false one. They were both examined under torture, and afterwards De la Barre was broken on the wheel. He went bravely to his death, his only words being: "I could not have believed that they would kill a young man for such a trifle." Étalonde, who was condemned to lose his right hand and have his tongue cut out, escaped to Ferney, and no one dared to lay hands on him in Voltaire's house.

Yet another human life did Voltaire succeed in saving while he lived at Ferney. A young married couple named

Montbailli were condemned to death on a false accusation of murder. The man was first broken on the wheel and then burned, but the burning of the woman was deferred because she was pregnant. Voltaire hears of the case, sees through the infamous charge with his lightning glance, appeals to the French ministry, proves that an innocent man has been put to death, and saves the woman from the stake.

Besides protecting the life of the accused, he defended the honour of the dead. One of the last pieces of news that he received on his own deathbed was, that his appeal against the unjust sentence which had cost General Lally his life had been successful, that the sentence was reversed, the dead man acquitted. During these years Voltaire also found time to transform Ferney from a poor village into a prosperous town, to labour zealously for the abolition of serfdom in France, and to write a number of his most important books, in all of which his one aim was to undermine the dogmas of Christianity, which appeared to him to be at the root of the power of the priesthood and all the evils resulting therefrom. Nor did he neglect the claims of polite society; he built a private theatre, and engaged the best actors to play in it; and he was visited at Ferney by the most gifted and able men of the day.

The renown of Coppet cannot be compared with that of Ferney, but none the less it is a fair renown. From this place of banishment also, emanated the ardent desire for justice, the love of freedom and the love of truth.

Somewhat later in the nineteenth century each of the three principal countries of Europe sent its greatest author into exile; England sent Byron; Germany, Heinrich Heine; and France, Victor Hugo; and not one of these men lost any of his literary influence from the fact of his exile. But with the beginning of the century the time had gone by when men of letters were a great power. Even a genius of Voltaire's calibre would hardly have exercised the powerful, tangible influence in this century which he did in his own. And Mme. de Staël was far from being Voltaire's equal in genius. Moreover, her task was of an



entirely different nature. The outward power of the Church was temporarily broken, and in any case her mind was far too religious ever to have permitted her following in Voltaire's steps. The political despotism was so pronounced, that merely to omit the French Emperor's name from a work on Germany was regarded as a political demonstration and punished accordingly. But there was a task left undone by the Revolution with all its great outward reforms, a task the doing of which could not be forbidden by Imperial edict, and that was, the undermining of the mountain of religious, moral, social, national, and artistic prejudices which weighed upon Europe with an even heavier pressure than did the dominion of Napoleon, and which indeed had alone made that dominion possible. Voltaire himself had been entangled in many of these prejudices, especially the artistic and national. From Coppet, Mme. de Staël waged war upon them all. And none the less she, like Voltaire, found time to fulfil all social duties ; she too had her own theatre, and she both wrote plays for it, and acted in them. The châtelaine of Coppet was as untrammelled intellectually and as noble in her aims as was the philosopher of Ferney ; she was less fortunate and less powerful, but on account of her sex and her sufferings she is even more interesting. Voltaire succeeded in doing much for others. Mme. de Staël barely succeeded in defending herself.

## X

### “CORINNE”

IN her book, *Essai sur les Fictions*, Mme. de Staël makes the first attempt to define her literary ideal. Her motto is: Avoid legend and symbol, avoid the fantastic and the supernatural; it is nature, it is reality, that must reign in poetry. She does not as yet seem to have apprehended the fundamental difference between poetry as psychical delineation, and poetry as the free play of the imagination, the difference which later became so clear to her that we may call the apprehension of it one of her most important deserts as an authoress; for it was by means of this clear apprehension that she assisted her countrymen to an understanding of the relative position of their national poetic art. The French are, namely, accustomed to regard knowledge of human nature founded upon observation as the substance, the essence of poetry—such knowledge as is displayed in Molière's *Tartuffe* and *Misanthrope*. And just as Frenchmen as a rule seek the essence of poetry in observation, Germans seek it in intensity of feeling, and Englishmen in an exuberance of imagination which refuses to be restricted by rules, and leaps at a bound from the horrible to the ideal, and from the serious to the comic, not limiting itself to the natural, but also not employing the supernatural otherwise than as a profound symbol.

The poetry which radiates from the Italian soil and the Italian people is something different again from all these. In *Corinne*, the improvisatrice, Mme. de Staël seeks to personify poetical poetry as opposed to psychological poetry, *i.e.* poetry as understood by Ariosto, as opposed to the poetry of Shakespeare, Molière, and Goethe. In spite of her intention, however, she unconsciously makes *Corinne* half

northern. No one who has not laboured painfully to attain to a real, thorough understanding of the point of view of an entirely foreign race can know how difficult it is to shake off one's innate national prejudices. To do so it is necessary to breathe the same air, to live for some time in the same natural environments, as the foreign race. But for the foreign travel made obligatory by her banishment, Mme. de Staël could not have expanded her power of apprehension as she did.

In all modesty I lay claim to be able to speak on this matter from experience. It was during lonely walks in the neighbourhood of Sorrento that I first succeeded in seeing Shakespeare at such a distance that I could get a full view of him and really understand him and, consequently, his antithesis. I remember one day in particular which was in this respect to me very momentous.—I had been spending three days in Pompeii. Of all its temples, that of Isis had interested me most. Here, thought I, stood that goddess whose head (now in the National Museum) has open lips and a hole in the back of the neck. I went down to the underground passage behind the altar, from which the priests, by means of a neatly adjusted reed, enabled the goddess to deliver oracles. The reflection involuntarily occurred to me that, in spite of the craft of the priests and the credulity of the people, it must have been extremely difficult to produce any effect of mystery in this climate. The temple is a pretty little house standing in the bright sunshine; there is no abyss, no darkness, no horror; even at night its outlines must have stood clearly defined in the moonlight or the starlight. The landscape, in combination with the sober sense of the Roman people, prevented any development of mysticism or romance.

I went on to Sorrento. The road, hewn in the mountain side, follows the sea, now projecting into it, now receding from it; where it recedes one looks down upon a great ravine, filled with olive trees. The aspect of the country is at once grand and smiling, wild and peaceful. The bare rocks lose their austerity, illuminated by such a brilliant sun, and in every ravine lie white cottages, or villas,

or whole villages, framed in the shining green foliage of the orange trees or the soft velvety grey of the olives. Upon the other side the white towns lie strewn, as if scattered by a sugar-sifter, on the wooded sides of the mountains, right up to the topmost ridge. The sea was indigo blue, in some places steel blue, the sky without a cloud; and in the distance lay the enchantingly beautiful rocky island of Capri. Nowhere else is to be found such a glorious harmony of line and colour. Elsewhere, even in the most beautiful spots, there is always something to take exception to—the lines of Vesuvius, for example, melt almost too softly into the air. But Capri! The contours of its jagged rocks are like rhythmic music. What balance in all its lines! How grand and yet how delicate, how bold and yet how charming it all is! This is Greek beauty—nothing gigantic, nothing that appeals to the vulgar, but absolute harmony within clearly defined bounds. From Capri one sees the islands of the sirens, past which Ulysses sailed. Homer's Ithaca was like this, only perhaps less beautiful; for Greek-peopled Southern Italy is the only living evidence of what the climate of Greece was in ancient days; the land of Greece itself is now but the corpse of what it was.

It began to grow dark; Venus shone brilliantly, and the great flanks and clefts of the mountains gradually assumed the fantastic appearances which darkness imparts. But the general impression was not what a Northerner calls romantic. The sea still glimmered through the delicate foliage of the olives, its deep blue broken by branch and leaf. Then it was I realised that there is a world, the world of which the Bay of Naples is an image, of which Shakespeare knew nothing; because it is great without being terrible, and enchanting without the aid of romantic mists and fairy glamour. I now for the first time rightly understood such painters as Claude Lorraine and Nicholas Poussin; I comprehended that their classic art is the expression of classic nature; and by force of contrast I understood better than ever before such a work as Rembrandt's etching of "The Three Trees"—which stand like sentient beings, like types of northern humanity, on the swampy field in the pouring

rain. I understood how natural it is that a land such as this should not have produced a Shakespeare, or needed a Shakespeare, because here Nature has taken upon herself the task which falls to the lot of the poet in the North. Poetry of the profound, psychological species is, like artificial heat, a necessity of life where nature is ungentle. Here in the South, from the days of Homer to the days of Ariosto, poetry has been able to rest content with mirroring, clearly and simply, the clearness and simplicity of nature. It has not sought to probe the depths of the human heart, has not plunged into caverns and abysses in search of the precious stones which Aladdin sought, which Shakespeare found, but which the sun-god here scatters in lavish profusion over the surface of the earth.

*Corinne, ou l'Italie* is Mme. de Staël's best tale. In Italy, that natural paradise, her eyes were opened to the charms of nature. She no longer preferred the gutters of Paris to the Lake of Nemi. And it was in this country, where a square yard of such a place, for instance, as the Forum, has a grander history than the whole Russian empire, that her modern, rebellious, melancholy soul opened to the influence of history, the influence of antiquity with its simple, austere calm. In Italy too, in Rome, that house of call for all Europe, the characteristics and limitations of the different nations were first clearly revealed to her. Through her, her own countrymen for the first time became conscious of their peculiarities and limitations. In her book, England, France, and Italy meet, and are understood, not by each other, but by the authoress and her heroine, who is half English and half Italian. *Corinne* is, in the world of fiction, like a prophecy of what Elizabeth Barrett Browning was to be in the world of reality. One thinks of *Corinne* when one reads that Italian inscription upon a house in Florence: "Here lived Elizabeth Barrett Browning, whose poems are a golden thread binding Italy to England."

The plot of *Corinne* is as follows: A young Englishman, Oswald, Lord Nelvil, who has lost the father he loved above everything on earth, and whose grief is the more

poignant because he reproaches himself for having embittered the last years of that father's life, attempts to distract his thoughts by travel in Italy. He arrives in Rome just as the poetess, Corinne, is borne in triumph to the Capitol, and, although public appearances and public triumphs do not harmonise with his ideal of womanhood, he is quickly attracted by, and soon passionately in love with, Corinne, who is as frank and natural as she is intellectual. But though intercourse with her reveals all her beautiful and rare qualities to him, he never loses the fear that she is not a suitable wife for a highly born Englishman. She is not the weak, timid woman, absorbed in her duties and her feelings, whom he would choose for his wife in England, where the domestic virtues are a woman's glory and happiness. He entertains morbid scruples as to whether his dead father would have desired such a daughter-in-law as Corinne, a question which, as time goes on, he plainly perceives must be answered in the negative.

Corinne, whose love is far deeper and fuller than his, is alarmed by his vacillation, and, fearing that he may suddenly leave Italy, endeavours to keep him there by rousing his interest in the history and antiquities of the country, its art, its poetry, and its music. Oswald is especially perturbed by the mystery attaching to Corinne's life; her real name and her parentage are unknown; she speaks many languages; she has no relatives; he fears something discreditable in the circumstances which have thrust her out into the world alone. As a matter of fact, Corinne is the daughter of an Englishman and a Roman lady. After her father's second marriage she had been brought up by her stepmother, in a little narrow-minded English country town. Tortured by the petty restrictions which were designed to crush her spirit, she had left England after her father's death, and had since lived an independent, but absolutely blameless life as a poetess. She is aware that her family and Oswald's are acquainted, that his father had chosen her for his daughter-in-law, and that a match is now projected between Oswald and her younger sister, Lucile. This not remarkably probable complication

provides a pretext for description of Italy. Whenever Oswald entreats Corinne to tell him her past history, she endeavours to postpone the moment of explanation ; and she can find no better means of diverting his thoughts than constituting herself his cicerone, showing him ruins, galleries, and churches, and finally carrying him off on a tour through the most famous parts of Italy. Like a second Scheherazade, she strives to prolong her life and ward off the threatening danger by daily showing him new splendours, in comparison with which those of the *Thousand and One Nights* pale ; and these splendours she provides with an accompaniment of subtle, profound comment.

In this manner the description of Rome, the delineation of Neapolitan scenery, and that of the tragic beauty of Venice, present themselves naturally, one after the other. It is in Rome that Corinne's great passion comes into being, so Rome provides the scenery for the first act of this love story ; its solemn grandeur and wide horizon harmonise with these profound emotions and serious thoughts. In Naples her love rises to its highest lyrical expression ; here the volcano and the smiling splendour of the bay are her background, and music upon the sea accompanies her passionately sorrowful improvisation on the subject of woman's love and woman's destiny. In Venice, where one is so perpetually forced to reflect on the decay and annihilation of beauty, Oswald leaves Corinne for ever.

The news that his regiment is ordered to India recalls him to England. He considers himself betrothed to Corinne, and hastens to find her stepmother and secure the restoration of the fugitive to her family rights. But at Lady Edgermond's he meets Corinne's half-sister, Lucile, and her modest, womanly loveliness by slow degrees obliterates the impression made by the elder sister, whose brilliant gifts do not seem so alluring from a distance, and whose independent, bold appearance in the full sunshine of public life does not augur well for wedded happiness in a country where the subdued light of home (with which Lucile's subdued character is in admirable keeping) is the only one in which a woman can show herself with advantage. Marriage with

Corinne would be a challenge to society ; and he feels that it would, consequently, be a slight to his father's memory. Marriage with Lucile, on the other hand, would be unanimously approved of by society. In Corinne, he would wed the foreign, the far off, that which would be irreconcilable in the long run with the spirit of his country ; in Lucile, he would wed as it were England itself. Corinne, who in agonising anxiety has followed him to England, learns his state of mind, and sends him back his ring. Oswald believes that she has ceased to love him, and marries Lucile. He learns of the wrong he has done her, and the story ends tragically with his remorse, and Corinne's death.

We have little difficulty in determining which of the events and circumstances of the book had their counterparts in real life. Oswald's melancholy brooding over the memory of his father, reminds us that the authoress at the time she wrote was mourning Necker's death. Another trait in Oswald borrowed from her own character, is his very feminine fear of taking a step to which the sole objection offered by his conscience is, that it would scarcely have won his dead father's approbation. Possibly, too, his grief that the last years of his father's life had been troubled by his conduct, had a point of correspondence in the authoress's own history. In all else, Oswald's personality is obviously a free rendering of that of Benjamin Constant. Many small details betray that Mme. de Staël clearly had Constant in her mind. Oswald comes from Edinburgh, where Constant spent part of his youth ; and it is stated that he is exactly eighteen months younger than Corinne (Mme. de Staël was born on the 22nd of April, 1766, and Constant on the 25th of October, 1767) ; but far weightier evidence is to be found in the whole cast of the character, in the blending of chivalrous courage, displayed towards the outer world, with unchivalrous cowardice, displayed towards the loving and long-loved woman whom he abandons in order to escape from her superiority. But remark that Mme. de Staël has created a typical Englishman out of these and many added elements.

In Corinne the authoress has depicted for us her own



ideal. She has borrowed the chief characteristics of her heroine from her own individuality. Corinne is not, like Delphine, the woman who is confined to the sphere of private life; she is the woman who has overstepped the allotted limits, the poetess whose name is upon all lips. The authoress has given her her own exterior, only idealised, her own eyes, even her own picturesque dress, with the Indian shawl wound about her head. She has endowed her with her own clear, active intellect; but it is with Corinne, as with herself—the moment passion grips her with its eagle's talon, her intellect avails her nothing, she becomes its defenceless prey. Like Mme. de Staël, Corinne is an exile, with all the thoughts and sorrows of the exile. For in Italy she is severed from the land of her birth, in England banished from the home of her heart and its sunshine. Hence when Corinne sings of Dante, she dwells sorrowfully on his banishment, and declares her belief that his real hell must have been exile. Hence, too, when giving Oswald an account of her life, she says that for a being full of life and feeling, exile is a punishment worse than death; for residence in one's native country implies a thousand joys which one first realises when bereft of them. She speaks of all the manifold interests which one has in common with one's fellow-countrymen, that are incomprehensible to a foreigner, and of that necessity for constant explanation which takes the place of rapid, easy communication, in which half a word does duty for a long exposition. Corinne, too, like her creator, hopes that her growing fame will bring about her recall to her native land, and reinstatement in her rights. Finally, Mme. de Staël has endowed Corinne with her own culture. It is expressly stated that it was her knowledge of the literatures and understanding of the characters of foreign nations that gave Corinne so high a place in the literary ranks of her own country; her charm as a poet lay in her combination of the southern gift of colour with the northern gift of observation. Employing all these borrowed characteristics, and inventing many others, the authoress has, it is to be observed, succeeded in producing a distinctly Italian type of female character.

Mme. de Staël's literary activity divides itself, as it were, into two activities—a masculine and a feminine, the expression of thoughts and the dwelling upon emotions. We can trace this duality in *Corinne*. The book has, unquestionably, more merit as an effort of the intellect than as a work of creative imagination. A peculiar fervour and a certain tenderness in the treatment of the emotions betray that the author is a woman. Psychology is still in such a backward condition that as yet only the merest attempt has been made to define the characteristic qualities of woman's mind, of woman's soul, as distinguished from man's; when the day comes for making the attempt in good earnest, Mme. de Staël's works will be one of the most valuable sources of enlightenment.

The woman's hand is, perhaps, most perceptible in the delineation of the hero. The authoress supplies us with the reasons for each of his distinguishing qualities. His sense of honour is explained by his distinguished birth, his melancholy by his English "spleen" and by his unhappy relations with the father whom he worshipped, as Mme. de Staël worshipped hers, and by whose memory he allowed himself to be influenced in a manner which reminds us of the way in which Søren Kierkegaard was influenced by the memory of his father. Only one thing does the writer leave unexplained in a person whose moral courage is so extremely slight, and that is the recklessness with which he risks his life. Female novelists almost invariably equip their heroes with a courage which has no particular connection with their character, while at the same time, in modern society, it is generally women who prevent men from doing deeds of daring, and who also as a rule admire and pay hysterical homage to essentially cowardly public characters—the priests who carefully protect their own lives in epidemics, the warriors who attack the enemy upon paper. The explanation would seem to be that masculine courage is a quality which, regarded as the highest attribute of man, becomes to woman a sort of ideal, but an ideal which she does not understand, which she does not recognise in real life, and which perhaps for this very reason she chooses to portray—and portrays badly.

These remarks apply more particularly to Oswald's heroic behaviour on the occasion of the fire at Ancona, where he saves the entire town under the most terrible circumstances. He alone, with his English followers, makes an attempt to extinguish the conflagration, an attempt which is crowned with success. He rescues the Jews, who are shut up in the Ghetto, where the people in their religious frenzy have left them to be burned as a propitiatory offering. He ventures into the burning asylum, into the room in which the most dangerous lunatics are confined; these maniacs he controls and rescues from the flames by which they are already surrounded; he loosens their chains, and will not leave one recalcitrant behind. The whole scene is excellently described, but, as already said, the psychology is weak. Mme. de Staël makes full amends for this, however, in her description of the impression made by these deeds upon Corinne's womanly heart. Oswald, by leaving the town at once, manages to escape from all expressions of gratitude; but on the return journey they come to Ancona again, he is recognised, and Corinne is awakened in the morning by shouts of: "Long live Lord Nelvil! long live our benefactor!" She goes out on the piazza, is recognised as the poetess whose name is famous all over Italy, and is received with acclamation. The crowd beseech her to be their spokeswoman, and interpret their gratitude to Oswald. When he in his turn appears on the piazza, he is amazed to see that the crowd is led by Corinne. "She thanked Lord Nelvil in the name of the people, and did it with such grace and nobility that all the inhabitants of Ancona were enraptured." And, adds the authoress with feminine subtlety, she said *we* in speaking for them. "You have saved *us*." "*We* owe you our lives." This *we* makes the more impression because of the authoress, earlier in the book, having dwelt upon the moment when Corinne and Oswald first used the word *we*, in arranging a walk in Rome, feeling all the happiness of the timid declaration of love therein implied. Now Corinne dissolves that *we*, that she may range herself on the side of those who owe him everything. And the story goes on to tell that when she

approached to offer Lord Nelvil in the name of the people the wreath of oak and laurel leaves which they had woven for him, she was overcome by an indescribable emotion, and felt almost afraid as she drew near him. At the moment of her offering the wreath, the whole populace, in Italy so susceptible and so ready to worship, fell on their knees, and Corinne involuntarily followed their example. It is in the delineation of feminine emotions that Mme. de Staël excels, the emotions of a gifted woman who pays dearly for her gifts.

Domestic happiness and feminine purity are what touch Corinne most deeply. She, the Sibyl, is moved when she reads the inscription on a Roman woman's sarcophagus : "No stain has soiled my life from wedding festival to funeral pyre. I have lived chastely between the two torches." But wedded happiness was not to be hers. It was not for Corinne as it was not for Mignon, the two children of longing who, the one in French, the other in German literature, as it were personify enthusiasm for Italy. Corinne herself says that only through suffering can our poor human nature attain to an understanding of the infinite ; and she is as if created to suffer. But before she perishes as the last victim in the ancient arena, she is adorned for the sacrifice and led in triumphal procession.

When we first meet her, on her progress to the Capitol, she is simply but picturesquely clad, with antique cameos in her hair, and a fine red shawl wound turbanwise about her head, as in Gérard's well-known portrait of Mme. de Staël. The costume suits Corinne : she is the child of the land of colour, and she has not lost her love of colour ; even in stiff conventional England she has retained her fresh natural tastes, her joy in what Gautier has called the trinity of beautiful things—gold, purple, and marble.

Like all the other great types of the period, she must be seen in the surroundings with which she harmonises, among which she is at home, as René is in the primeval forest, Obermann upon the heights of the Alps, and Saint-Preux by the Lake of Geneva. Her appearance has been preserved to posterity in the painting which engravings have made so familiar : Corinne improvising at Cape Miseno.

Her volcanic, glowing nature is at home in this volcanic, glowing region. The Bay of Naples appears to be a great sunken crater, surrounded by fair towns and forest-clad mountains. Encircling a sea which is even bluer than the sky, it resembles an emerald goblet filled with foaming wine, its rims and its sides adorned with vine leaves and tendrils. Near land the sea is a deep azure blue; farther out it is, as Homer said, wine-coloured; and above it shines a sky which is not, as is generally believed, bluer than ours, but really paler, only that its blue is underlaid by a white fire, which glows with a shimmer that is both blue and white. It was in this region that the ancients imagined hell to lie; the descent to it being through the cave of the Lake of Avernus. They called it hell, this paradise. Its volcanic origin and surroundings made them feel as if Tartarus were not far off. Volcanic formations everywhere! One great mountain has a side which looks as if it had been cut with a knife; half of that mountain fell in an earthquake. Cape Miseno, the farthest-out point of land on one side of the bay, with the little rocky island of Nisida in front of it, and Procida and Ischia behind it, did not always consist, as now, of two separate heights—long ago there was only one. The two craters of Vesuvius were formed by the eruption which overwhelmed Pompeii. Fertility and fire everywhere! A few steps from where the sulphureous fumes of Solfatara force their way up into the air through the crumbling lava, lie fields, some one mass of bright-red poppies, others full of great blue flowers, of powerfully scented downy mints and other herbs growing waist-high in such thronging profusion, such fruitfulness and luxuriance, that one feels as if all this billowing fulness would shoot up again in a single night, were it all cut down. And then the overpowering perfume! a spicy fragrance unknown in the north, a stupendous symphony of the scents of millions of different plants!

It is towards evening that Corinne and her friends find their way out to Cape Miseno. From there one looks back upon the great town, and one hears a dull sound, which is like the beat of its heart. After sunset lights become visible

everywhere ; they are lying even in the ruts of the roads ; across the path and away up the mountain sides bright flames leap and flit through the air ; those which fly highest resemble moving stars. These flames, which move with long leaps and are extinguished for a moment after each leap, are the fire-flies of the South. The myriads of lights flashing through the darkness transport one in thought to fairyland. Right opposite, looking from Cape Miseno, the fiery lava glows with a ruddy glare as it streams down the side of Vesuvius.

It is here that they bring Corinne her lyre, and that she sings of the glories of the scenery, and of the many memories of this land—of Cumæ, where the Sibyl dwelt ; of Gaeta, close to the spot where the tyrant's dagger was plunged into Cicero's heart ; of Capri and Baiæ, where men recall the deeds of darkness of Tiberius and Nero ; of Nisida, where Brutus and Portia bade each other a last farewell ; of Sorrento, where Tasso, just escaped from a mad-house, a miserable, hunted creature, ragged and unshaven, knocked at the door of the sister, who first did not recognise him, and then could not speak for tears. It is here that she ends her song with an elegy on all the suffering of this earthly life and all its happiness.

Listen to the inspired words uttered by Corinne in these surroundings, where beauty is based upon ruin, where happiness reveals itself as a flitting, quickly extinguished flame, and where fertility is perpetually endangered by a volcano.

She says : " Jesus permitted a frail and perhaps repentant woman to anoint His feet with the most precious ointment ; He rebuked those who counselled her to keep it for a more useful purpose. ' Let her alone,' He said ; ' Me ye have not always with you.' Alas ! all that is good and great is with us upon this earth only for a short time. Old age, infirmities, and death soon dry up the dewdrop which falls from heaven and rests upon the flower. Let us then blend everything together—love, religion, genius, sunshine and perfumes, music and poetry ; the only true atheism is coldness, selfishness, and baseness. It is said : ' Where two

or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them.' And what is it, O God, to be gathered together in Thy name, if it be not to enjoy the wondrous gifts of Thy fair nature, to render homage to Thee for them, to thank Thee for life, and to thank Thee most of all when another heart also created by Thee fully and entirely responds to our own !"

Thus she speaks under the influence of her dual inspiration, in her life's meridian, when she is attempting to interweave the happiness of genius with the happiness of love, as the myrtle and the laurel were interwoven in the wreath with which she was crowned at the Capitol. It may not be ; they untwist, they recoil from each other ; and Corinne, the inspired Sibyl, becomes one of the many crushed, despairing spirits through whom the genius of the century utters its protest against that society which, like these apparently safe towns, is undermined by volcanic flames, flames which are never at rest, but find vent in one outburst after another, throughout the whole of the restless and unhappy nineteenth century.

## XI

### ATTACK UPON NATIONAL AND PROTESTANT PREJUDICES

ONE might call *Corinne* a work on national prejudices. Oswald represents all those of England; his travelling companion, Count d'Erfeuil, all those of France; and it is against the prejudices of these two nations, at that time the most powerful and the most self-reliant in Europe, that the heroine does battle with her whole soul. It is no cold-blooded, impersonal warfare, for Corinne's future depends upon whether she can succeed in freeing Oswald from his national prejudices to such an extent as to enable him to be happy with a woman like herself, whose life conflicts at every turn with the English conception of what is becoming in woman. But while she is attempting to widen Oswald's view of life and to impart pliancy to his rigid mind, which always starts back again into its accustomed grooves, she is at the same time carrying on the education of the reader. Mme. de Staël continues in the domain of the emotions the task with which we have seen her occupied in the domain of thought. She sketches the first outlines of *national* psychology, shows how there is a colouring of nationality even in men's most private, personal feelings. Her countrymen were then, much in the manner of the Germans of to-day, attempting to blot out the national colours of neighbouring countries in the complacent persuasion that they themselves had a monopoly of civilisation. Her inmost desire is to show them that their conception of life is but one among many conceptions that are equally justifiable, some of them possibly more justifiable.

When we remember how powerful is the prejudice which, in every country without exception, makes it a crime



for the individual to deny that his nation is in possession of all the virtues which it ascribes to itself, and which so many a sanctimonious Jack-in-the-box finds it to his advantage to assure it daily that it possesses, we shall understand what courage Mme. de Staël displayed in attacking French national vanity at such a period.

There is one great idea that is more fatal than any other to the coercive power wielded by the established beliefs and customs of any given society. It has nothing to do with the logic of the matter. One would imagine that logic, let loose among the whole stock of prejudices ruling in any given country at any given time, would work the same havoc as a bull in a china-shop; but such is not the case; pure logic does not affect the majority of mankind at all! No! if you would really awaken and astound the generality of men, you must succeed in making it plain to them that what they consider absolute is only relative—that is to say, must show them that the standards which they believe to be universally recognised, are only accepted as standards by so and so many similarly constituted minds; whereas other nations and other races have an entirely different conception of the befitting and the beautiful. In this manner the general public of a country learn for the first time that the art and poetry which they despise are regarded by whole races as the highest, while their own, which to them seem the finest in the world, are held in slight esteem by other nations; learn, moreover, that it is vain to take refuge in the thought that all other nations are mistaken in their judgment, seeing that each one of these other nations believes that all the rest are mistaken. If I were asked to define in one word the service rendered by Mme. de Staël to French society, to its culture and literature, and through these to Europe in general, I should express myself thus: By means of her writings, more particularly her great works on Italy and Germany, she enabled the French, English, and German peoples to take a *comparative* view of their own social and literary ideas and theories.

Count d'Erfeuil, in *Corinne*, is a cleverly drawn type of French superficiality and vanity in combination with some

of the most charming and characteristic of French virtues. One does not really appreciate the character until one has repeatedly reflected on the amount of courage that was required to introduce into a circle of foreigners, as the sole, and properly accredited, representative of France, such an extremely narrow-minded personage as D'Erfeuil. He is a young French *émigré*, who has fought with singular gallantry in the war, has submitted to the confiscation of his large estates not merely with serenity, but with cheerfulness, and has with great self-sacrifice tended and supported the old uncle who brought him up, who like himself is an *émigré*, and who without him would be absolutely helpless—in short, there is a foundation of chivalry and unselfishness in his character. When one talks to him, however, one feels it impossible to believe that he is a man of much and sad experience, for he positively seems to have forgotten all that has happened to him. He talks of the loss of his fortune with admirable frivolity, and with equal, if less admirable, frivolity on all other subjects.

Oswald meets him in Germany, where he is nearly bored to death; he has lived there for several years, but it has never occurred to him to learn a word of the language. He intends to go to Italy, but anticipates no pleasure from travelling in that country; he is certain that any French provincial town has more agreeable society and a better theatre than Rome. "Do you not mean to learn Italian?" asks Oswald. "No," he replies; "that is not part of my plan of study;" and he looks as serious when giving this answer as if something very important had led him to the determination. In Italy he does not vouchsafe the landscape so much as a glance. His conversation turns neither on outward objects nor on feelings; it hovers between reflection and observation as between two poles, neither of which it touches; its topics are always society topics; it is garnished with puns and anecdotes, is chiefly about his numberless acquaintances, is indeed in its essence nothing but society gossip. Oswald is astonished by this strange mixture of courage and superficiality. D'Erfeuil's contempt for danger and misfortune would have seemed admirable

to him if it had cost more effort, and heroic if it had not been the outcome of the very qualities which render him incapable of deep feeling. As it is, he finds it tiresome.

When D'Erfeuil for the first time sees St. Peter's in the distance, he likens it to the dome of the Invalides in Paris—a comparison more patriotic than apt; when he sees Corinne at the Capitol he feels a desire to make her acquaintance, but no reverence for her. He is not surprised that her heart has remained untouched in a country where he finds no good qualities in the men, but he cannot help flattering himself with the hope that she will be unable to resist the charms of a well-bred young Frenchman. When she speaks to others in his presence in Italian or English (languages he does not understand), he says to her: "Speak French. You know the language and are worthy to speak it."

When he sees that Corinne loves Oswald he does not take it amiss, though his vanity is wounded; but he thinks her passion foolish, because of the improbability of its bringing her happiness. At the same time he most strongly advises Oswald not to enter into a lifelong union with an unpresentable woman like Corinne. With all his daring, he bows to the supreme authority of established custom. "If you will be foolish," he says to Oswald, "at least do nothing irreparable;" reckoning among irreparable follies marriage with Corinne. His ideas on literary, correspond to his ideas on social subjects. In Corinne's house the conversation frequently turns upon Italian and English poetry. D'Erfeuil, starting from the premise that French poetry from the time of Louis XV. onwards forms the unquestioned standard, is naturally very severe in his judgment of all foreign productions. To him the Germans are barbarians, the Italians are corrupters of style, and "the taste and elegance of French style" are law-giving in literature. "Our stage literature," he remarks, "is admittedly the finest in Europe, and I do not think that it occurs even to the English themselves to compare Shakespeare with our dramatists." In a company of Italians he shrewdly enough, if without much delicacy, defines Italian drama as consisting of ballets, silly tragedies, and wearisome harlequinades; to him

the Greek drama is coarse, Shakespeare formless. "Our drama," he says, "is a model of refinement and beauty of form. To introduce foreign ideas among us would be to plunge us into barbarism."

D'Erfeuil considers the antiquities of Rome altogether overrated. He is not going to fatigue himself, he says, by toiling through all these old ruins. He makes his way northwards, but is as bored by Alpine scenery as he was by Rome. In the end he goes to England, where he assists Corinne in her misfortunes; his deeds have ever been nobler than his words. He cannot, however, when he sees how miserable her love for Oswald has made her, deny his vanity the satisfaction of ringing the changes upon "I told you so;" and he considers it a duty to himself not to let the opportunity slip of offering himself as Oswald's successor. For all this, it is true and unselfish devotion that he displays, and Corinne is distressed by her inability to be more truly grateful to him; but he is so careless and scatter-brained that she is constantly tempted to forget his generous deeds just as he himself forgets them. "It is very charming, no doubt," observes the authoress, "to set little value on one's own good deeds, but it may be that the indifference with which some men regard their own noble actions has its origin in their superficiality." Without regard for anything but what she considers the truth, she thus derives some of the most conspicuous virtues of her countrymen from weaknesses in their character.

By means of this typical character of D'Erfeuil, Mme. de Staël shows how in France all good feelings are held in check by one vice, that fear of society which has its origin in vanity. It seems to her as if all feeling, the whole of life, indeed, were ruled by *esprit*, by the desire to appear to advantage, and by a fear which may be expressed in the words, "What will people say?" An author who writes not long after Mme. de Staël, the acute and original Henri Beyle, is of the same opinion. His name for Frenchmen is *les vainifs*, and he asserts that all their actions are dictated by the consideration, *Qu'en dira-t-on?* the fear, that is to say, of the unbecoming or ridiculous. The French were then,

what the Danes are still, very proud of their keen sense of the comical ; it was this which led them to describe themselves modestly as the wittiest nation in the world. Corinne maintains that this sense of the ridiculous, with the corresponding fear of being ridiculous, destroys all originality in manners, in dress, and in speech, prevents all free play of imagination, and stifles natural expression of feeling. She maintains that feeling, that every kind of intellectuality, is obliged to take the form of wit instead of the form of poetry, in a country where the fear of becoming the victim of wit or mockery makes each man try to be the first to seize those weapons. "Are we," she asks D'Erfeuil, "only to live for what society may say of us? Is what others think and feel always to be our guiding star? If this be so, if we are intended to imitate each other for ever and ever, why has each one of us been given a soul? Providence might have spared itself this unnecessary outlay."

The national prejudices of France are typified in D'Erfeuil; in Oswald we have a personification of all the prejudices which have been part of England's strength and England's weakness throughout the centuries. Powerful nations are always unjust, and their injustice both adds to their power and limits it. It was upon this injustice that Mme. de Staël considered it her mission to throw a very strong light.

The story of the book turns upon the attempt of a woman to regain, by means of a man's love, that place in English society which she has forfeited by too great independence, by entering the arena of public life; consequently what the authoress chiefly dwells upon in her delineation of English character is the narrowness of the English conception of ideal womanhood. From this conception, with which he has been brought up, Oswald makes sincere but fruitless efforts to free himself. When, in Italy, he sees Corinne admired and loved for her great gifts, without a thought being given to her sex or her enigmatical past, he is greatly perplexed. There is something repulsive to him in a woman's leading this public life. He is accustomed to look upon woman as a sort of higher domestic animal, and for long cannot reconcile himself to

the idea of society forgiving her the crime of having talent. He feels himself as it were humiliated and exasperated by the thought; he regards it as impossible that a woman with such a well-developed, independent mind should be capable of binding herself faithfully to one man and living contentedly for him alone. And though, in spite of everything, Corinne loves him, loves him with a passion beside which all that he has seen or heard of pales, and which is so unselfish that it leads her to risk her reputation for his sake without demanding anything whatever in return, he forgets her, her great gifts, her nobility of mind and soul, the moment he stands once again upon English soil, inhales English mists and prejudices, and meets a fresh young girl of sixteen, the very perfection of a wife after the English recipe, reserved, ignorant, innocent, silent, a fair-haired, blue-eyed incarnation of domestic duty.

The authoress tracks the prejudice which explains Oswald's conduct to its source, which she finds to be the English conception of home. Oswald's principal difficulty in coming to a decision about Corinne is expressed in the words: "Of what use would all that be at home?" "And home is everything to us—to the women, at least," remarks an Englishman to Oswald; and the authoress herself remarks elsewhere: "Though it is possible for an Englishman to find pleasure for a time in foreign ways and customs, his heart invariably returns to the impressions of his childhood. If you ask the Englishman you meet on board ship in foreign climes whither he is bound, he answers, if he is upon the return journey: '*Home.*'"<sup>1</sup> It is to this English love of home that she attributes both the superstition that the independent intellectual development of woman is absolutely incompatible with the domestic virtues, and the English idolatry of these virtues. And, strange as it may seem to us to see the Italian woman, nowadays so indifferent to everything intellectual, set up as a model of independence, there is no doubt that Mme. de Staël is right. The ideal of well-being conveyed by the word home, is a genuine Northern, Teutonic conception, originally so foreign to the Latin races that the

<sup>1</sup> *Corinne*. 1807. I. 291; II. 21.

English word *home* has passed into the Latin languages, because these possess no equivalent. To this conception of home corresponds the word "cosiness" (untranslatable into any Latin language), which was created to express the pleasure of being able to sit warm and comfortable within four walls. We have not far to seek for the origin of this ideal. The inhabitant of Northern Europe, living in a raw climate, amidst cold, harsh natural surroundings, finds the same pleasure in the thought of sitting by a warm hearth whilst snow and rain beat impotently on the window pane, which a Neapolitan feels in the thought of sleeping under the warm, glorious, starry sky, or passing the cool night in dance, play, and song, in the open air. But to each of these different ideals of well-being and happiness corresponds a different conception of virtues and duties, which the nation that possesses or enforces them regards as the universal conception. It considers itself the first among nations because it exacts the fulfilment of these particular duties and possesses these particular virtues (which is not surprising, seeing that both are naturally entailed by the national character), and it moreover censures all the nations whose conceptions differ from its own.

Speaking of England, Oswald asks Corinne: "How could you leave the home of chastity and morality and make fallen Italy the country of your adoption?" "In this country," Corinne replies, "we are modest; neither proud of ourselves like the English, nor pleased with ourselves like the French." It gratifies her to put both the Puritanic arrogance of the Northerner and the vain Frenchman's fear of ridicule to shame, by comparing them with the frank naturalness which the people of Italy even in their humiliation have preserved. She describes, delicately and truthfully, the touching naïveté with which the latter display their emotions. There is no stiff reserve, as in England, no coquetry, as in France; here the woman simply desires to please the man she loves, and cares not who knows it. One of Corinne's friends, returning to Rome after an absence of some duration, calls upon a distinguished lady. He is informed by the servant that "the Princess does not receive

to-day ; she is out of spirits, she is *innamorata*." Corinne tells how indulgently a woman is judged in Italy, and how frankly she owns her feelings. A poor girl dictates a love-letter to a writer in the open streets, and the man writes it with the utmost seriousness, never omitting to add all the polite forms which it is his business to know ; hence some poor soldier or labourer receives a letter in which many tender assurances occupy the space between "Most honoured contemporary !" and "Yours with reverential respect." Corinne is perfectly correct. I have myself seen such letters. And, on the other hand, it seems as if learning had not been at all unusual among the Italian women of those days. A Frenchman in *Corinne* who calls a learned woman a pedant, receives the reply : "What harm is there in a woman's knowing Greek ?"

Neither does Corinne fail to perceive that the official recognition and support of duty and morality in the North is accompanied by the greatest brutality in all cases in which the laws of society have once been transgressed. She shows how the Englishman respects no promise or relation which has not been legally registered, and how in strict England the sanctity of marriage and an irreproachable home life exist side by side with the most shameless and bestial prostitution, just as the personal devil exists side by side with the personal God. She remarks, with womanly circumspection and modesty, but yet quite plainly : "In England it is the domestic virtues which constitute woman's glory and happiness ; but, granted that there are countries in which love is to be met with outside the bonds of holy matrimony, then undoubtedly among all these countries Italy is the one in which most regard is shown to woman's happiness. The men of that country have a code of morality for the regulation of those relations which are without the pale of morality—a tribunal of the heart." It is the same tribunal as that of the mediæval Courts of Love. Byron is greatly impressed when he comes to Italy and finds this complete moral code, exactly the opposite of the English. Mme. de Staël as usual tries to explain the milder morality by the milder climatic conditions ; she says : "The aberrations of the heart inspire a more indulgent compassion



here than in any other country. Jesus said of the Magdalen: 'Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much.' Those words were spoken under a sky as beautiful as ours. The same sky invokes for us the same Divine mercy."

Corinne, who is herself a Catholic, teaches the Scottish Protestant who loves her, to understand Italian Catholicism. "In this country, Catholicism, having had no other religion to combat, has become milder and more indulgent than it is anywhere else; in England, on the other hand, Protestantism, in order to annihilate Catholicism, has been obliged to arm itself with the utmost severity of principle and morality. Our religion, like the religion of the ancients, inspires the artist and the poet; is a part, so to speak, of all the pleasures of our life; while yours, which has had to adapt itself to a country where reason plays a much more important part than imagination, has received an imprint of moral severity which it will always retain. Ours speaks in the name of love, yours in the name of duty. Although our dogmas are absolute, our principles are liberal, and our orthodox despotism adapts itself to the circumstances of life, while your religious heresy insists upon obedience to its laws without making any allowance for exceptional cases."

She shows how, in consequence of this, there is always a certain dread of genius, of intellectual superiority, in Protestant countries. "It is a mistaken fear," she says; "for it is very moral, this superiority of mind and soul. He who understands everything becomes very compassionate, and he who feels deeply becomes good."

"Why are great powers a misfortune? Why have they prevented my being loved? Will he find in another woman more mind, more soul, more tenderness than in me? No, he will find less; but he will be content, because he will feel himself more in harmony with society. What fictitious pleasures, what fictitious sorrows are those we owe to society! Under the sun and the starry heavens all that human beings need is to love and to feel worthy of each other; but society! society! how hard it makes the heart, how frivolous the mind! how it leads us to live only for what others will say of us! If human beings could but

meet freed from that influence which all collectively exercise upon each, how pure the air that would penetrate into the soul ! how many new ideas, how many genuine emotions would refresh it !"—"Receive my last salutation, O land of my birth !" cries Corinne in her swan song in praise of Rome—and one feels the bitterness of the exile and the thrust at Napoleon in the words that follow : "You have not grudged me fame, O liberal-minded people that do not banish women from your temples, that do not sacrifice immortal talent to passing jealousies ! You welcome genius wherever you recognise it ; for you know that it is a victor without victims, a conqueror that does not plunder, but takes from eternity wherewith to enrich time."

This sketch of the contrast between the emotional life of Catholicism and that of Protestantism prepares for a digression on the contrast between their respective views of art. On this latter point the book makes a decided attack on Protestant arrogance and want of all understanding of art, as exhibited by Oswald, who represents the narrowest English ideas.

In the midst of this plastic and musical people, who are so good-natured, so childlike, so careless of their dignity, and, according to English ideas, so immoral, Oswald, who is accustomed to regard it as the aim and end of existence to live up to certain insular conceptions of duty and dignity, feels himself very ill at ease. Devoid of all artistic feeling, he judges art now by a literary, now by a moral, now by a religious standard ; his prejudices are constantly offended ; he understands nothing. He notices some reliefs on the doors of St. Peter's, and great is his amazement to find that they represent scenes from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Leda with the swan, and the like ! What is this but pure paganism ! Corinne takes him to the Colosseum, and (in this resembling his contemporary Oehlenschläger) his one thought is that he is standing in a gigantic place of execution, his one feeling, moral indignation at the crimes here perpetrated against the early Christians. He enters the Sistine Chapel and, ignorant of the history of art, is greatly outraged that Michael Angelo has ventured to portray God the Father in ordinary human form, as though he were a Jupiter or a Zeus. He is equally scandal-

ised on finding in Michael Angelo's prophets and sibyls none of that humble Christian spirit which he had looked for in a Christian chapel.

All this the authoress has drawn from life. Italy presupposes in her visitors a certain amount of artistic, or æsthetic, taste. There are three ways of looking at everything—the practical, the theoretical, and the æsthetic. The forest is seen from the practical point of view by the man who inquires if it conduces to the healthiness of the district, or the owner who calculates its value as firewood; from the theoretical, by the botanist who makes a scientific study of its plant life; from the æsthetic or artistic, by the man who has no thought but for its appearance, its effect as part of the landscape. It is this last, the artistic, æsthetic view, that Oswald is unable to take. He has no eyes; his reasoning power and his morality have deprived his senses of their freshness. Therefore he cannot lose sight of the substance in the form, therefore the Colosseum awakens in him only the remembrance of all the blood so wickedly spilled there. In Corinne's vindication of the æsthetic view we feel the influence of Germany, more particularly of A. W. Schlegel, the first exponent of the awakening romantic spirit in that country. For, however differently Romanticism may develop in different countries, one thing which it invariably maintains is, that the beautiful is its own aim and end, or *Selbstzweck*, as it was called in Germany; an idea borrowed from Kant's *Kritik der Urtheilskraft*; the vindication of beauty as the standard and true aim of art. In France this theory was expressed by the formula *l'art pour l'art*, and it makes its appearance for the first time in Denmark in certain of Oehlenschläger's poems.

But it is not only the art, but the people and the life of Italy, that must be seen with the artist's eye to be understood and appreciated. Nothing is more common than to meet in Italy, Englishmen, Germans or Frenchmen, who, seeing everything from their national point of view, have nothing but blame for everything. In the eyes of the Germans the women lack that timid modesty, that maidenliness, which is their ideal; Englishmen are shocked by the want of cleanliness and order; Frenchmen are dissatisfied with the social

intercourse, the absence of conversational ability, and express contempt for the Italian prose style.

Corinne points out that the beauty of Italian women is not of a moral, but of a plastic and picturesque kind ; that to appreciate it we must have an eye susceptible to colour and form, not dulled by too much poring over printed books. She contrasts Italian improvisation with French conversation, and finds it equally admirable.

A sensible people like the English cultivate and appreciate practical business qualities ; an emotional people like the Germans cultivate and love music ; a witty people like the French cultivate conversation—that is to say, the best in them is brought out in intercourse, in converse with others ; an imaginative people like the Italians improvise—that is to say, rise naturally from their ordinary feelings into poetry. Corinne says : “ I feel myself a poet whenever my spirit is exalted ; when I am conscious of more than usual scorn for selfishness and meanness, and when I feel that a beautiful action would be easy to me—then it is that my verses are best. I am a poet when I admire, when I scorn, when I hate, not from personal motives, but on behalf of the whole of humanity.” And she does not rest content with defending the light nightingale-song which was what the Italians at that time understood by lyrical poetry ; she also accounts for the exaggerated importance attached to style and rhetorical pomp in Italian prose. She explains it partly by the love of the South for form, partly by the fact that men lived under an ecclesiastical despotism which forbade the serious treatment of any theme ; they knew that it was not possible for them to influence the course of events by their books, and so they wrote to show their skill in writing, to excite admiration by the elegance of their composition—and the means became the end.

Another of the things which had shocked Oswald was Michael Angelo's representation of the Divinity and the prophets in the Sistine Chapel. In the mighty human form of Jehovah he does not recognise that invisible, spiritual divinity into which the passionate national God of the old Hebrews has been transformed by the Protestantism of

the North ; and where among all these proud forms with which Michael Angelo has covered the ceiling in his Promethean desire to create human beings, where among those defiant, enthusiastic, despairing, struggling figures, is to be found the humility, the meekness he expected to see ? Corinne reads her countrymen a lesson, a lesson needed in other countries at this day, and especially in one like ours, where so much unintelligent talk is to be heard on the subject of Christian art and Christian æsthetics.

The passionately violent attack made by Søren Kierkegaard towards the end of his life upon so-called Christian art does not surprise us, coming as it did from a man destitute of all artistic culture. He first invests the painters of the Renaissance with his Protestant, nay, his personal, conception of religion, and is then shocked because, with this conception in the background of their consciousness, they could paint as they did. Oswald behaves in much the same way. He does not realise that the painters of the Renaissance stood in a different relation to their subjects from the painters of our day ; that whereas the artists of to-day seek to gain a real understanding of their subject, and study it either from the antiquarian, the ethnological, or the psychological point of view, the artist of the Renaissance took his subject as he found it, and made of it what he fancied—that is to say, what harmonised with his character. Herein is to be found the explanation of what surprises and shocks the Northerner in the old masters. For, just as a small selection of themes taken from the Iliad and the Odyssey provided the whole of Greek art—sculpture, painting, and drama—with its subjects (it is always the same story, of Paris and Helen, of Atreus and Thyestes, or of Iphigenia and Orestes), so a score of themes from the Old and New Testament (the Fall, Lot and his Daughters, the Nativity, the Flight into Egypt, the Passion) keep brush and chisel at work in Italy for three centuries. It is such subjects alone which artists are commissioned to paint, and for long it is only for the purpose of painting such subjects that study from the nude is permitted. Men's minds develop, the subjects remain the same. The pious, naïve faith of old days is superseded by the enthusias-

tic humanism and reviving paganism of the Renaissance ; but it is still Madonnas and Magdalens that are painted, with this difference, that the stiff Queen of Heaven of Byzantine art is transformed into an idealised peasant girl of Albano, and the woefully emaciated and remorseful sinner of Andrea del Verocchio into the voluptuous Magdalen of Correggio ; the apostles and martyrs too are still depicted, but the stoned and crucified saints of olden times, painted for the purpose of exciting compassion and devotional feeling, are transformed into the St. Sebastians of Titian and Guido Reni, the beautiful young page glowing with health and beauty, the dazzling white of whose flesh is thrown into relief by one or two drops of blood which drip from an arrow-head inserted becomingly between the ribs.

Oswald is taught by Corinne to admire the liberal spirit of Italian Catholicism, which in the days of the Renaissance permitted each artist to develop his talent or genius with perfect independence, even when he only made his Christian or Jewish subject a pretext for the representation of his own personal ideal of man or woman. This brings us to another of Oswald's stumbling-blocks, namely, that blending of the Christian and the pagan which so offended him in the reliefs by Antonio Filarete on the doors of St. Peter's. The same thing is to be observed everywhere ; everywhere the pagan material has been preserved and employed. The old basilicas and churches are built with the pillars of antique temples. A simple cross superficially christianises the obelisks, the Colosseum, and the interior of the Pantheon. The statues of Menander and Posidippos were prayed to as saints all through the Middle Ages.

Corinne shows Oswald that it is to this often childish, but always unprejudiced position towards the pagan and the human, that Catholicism owes the artistic glory with which it will always shine in history, a glory which will never be dimmed by the artistic performances of Protestantism. Protestantism tears down from above its altars the beautiful Albano peasant women with smiling babes at their breasts, under the pretext that they are Madonnas, whitewashes all the glowing pictures, and glories in bare walls.

The Italy of the Renaissance divested Christianity of its spirit of self-renunciation, of its Jewish-Asiatic character, and transformed it into a mythology, fragrant of incense, wreathed with flowers. Italian Catholicism allied itself with the civic spirit in the cities, and with all the fine arts when art was born again. Thus its interests were quite as often promoted from patriotic as from religious motives. It was in Tuscany that the Renaissance began. There humanity was born again after its fall, its renegation of Nature. There the first Italian republics were founded. There men once more willed ; houses congregated and formed small, proud, indomitably liberal states, each a town with its surrounding district. Towers and spires rose into the air, erect and proud as the bearing of a free man ; fortified palaces were begun, churches were completed ; but the church was far more a state treasure-house, a witness to wealth, perseverance, and artistic taste, a valuable item in the rivalry between state and state, between Siena and Florence, than a dwelling-place of "Our Most Blessed Lady." Much more was done in honour of Siena than in honour of God. A Tuscan church, such as that of Orvieto, with its mosaics inlaid in gold, or that of Siena, with its façade of sculptured marble resembling the lace robe of some youthful beauty, is to us much more of a jewel-casket than a church.

Or think of the Church of St. Mark in Venice. The first time one sees it, one feels momentarily surprised by its oriental façade, its bright cupolas, its peculiar arches resting on pile upon pile of short, clustered pillars of red and green marble. After casting a glance from the piazza at the mosaics of the outside walls, rich colours on a golden ground, one enters, and one's first thought is : Why, this is all gold, golden vaulting, golden walls ! The minute gilt tesserae composing the mosaic background of all the pictures form one great plane of gold. A sunbeam falling upon it produces sparkling flecks upon the darker ground, and the whole church seems aflame. The floor, undulating with age, is composed of a mosaic of red, green, white, and black marble. The pillars, which are of reddish marble, have capitals of gilded bronze. The small arched

windows are of white, not stained glass ; coloured windows would be unsuitable with all this magnificence ; they are for less gorgeous churches. The pillars are alternated with enormous square columns of greenish marble, at least six yards in diameter, which support gilded half-arches ; each cupola rests upon four such half-arches. The smaller pillars which support altars, &c., are, some of green and red speckled marble, some of transparent alabaster. All the lower-lying marble, that, for instance, of the seats and benches running along the sides of the church and surrounding the columns, is of a bright red colour. The whole church, as seems only natural in a town whose school of painting so entirely subordinated form to colour, impresses by its picturesqueness, not by its architectural grandeur. With its gilded ornaments, its inlaid stalls, its lovely bronzes, its golden statues, candelabra, and capitals, San Marco lies there like some luxurious Byzantine beauty, heavily laden with gold and pearls and sparkling diamonds, the richest brocade covering her oriental couch.

Such a church as this was undoubtedly originally an expression of religious enthusiasm, but in the palmy days of the Renaissance, as the building became ever more and more richly ornamented, religious feeling was entirely supplanted by love of art. Very significant of this is the one inscription in the church, which is to be found above the principal entrance : "*Ubi diligenter inspexeris artemque ac laborem Francisci et Valerii Zucati Venetorum fratrum agnoveris tandem judicato.*" (When you have diligently studied and considered all the art and all the labour which we two Venetian brothers, Francesco and Valerio Zucati, have expended here, then judge us.) A caution by the artists against hasty criticism.

The brothers Zucati were the masters in their art who in the sixteenth century executed most of the mosaics in the church, entirely, or principally, after designs by Titian. Such an inscription, which, instead of being an invitation to worship, a greeting to the faithful, a benediction, or a text of Scripture, is an appeal to the beholder to examine carefully and seriously the artistic work executed in the



service of religion, would be an impossibility in or on a Protestant church.

When the Catholic faith disappears, as it is doing to-day in Italy, from the Catholic Church, when Inquisition and fanaticism become a legend, when the ugly animal in the snail-shell dies, the beautifully whorled shell will still remain. There will still remain the magnificent churches, statues, and paintings; there will still remain Michael Angelo's Sistine Chapel, Raphael's Sistine Madonna, St. Peter's at Rome, the cathedrals of Milan, Siena, and Pisa. Protestantism has shown itself incapable of producing any great religious architecture; and, though iconoclasm has long been a thing of the past, Rembrandt remains the one great master in whose pictures it has shown capacity to give artistic expression to its religious sentiments.

It has been necessary to dwell a little upon the fact that Corinne, the art-loving poetess, always takes the part of Catholicism against Protestant Oswald, because here again the influence upon Mme. de Staël of her intercourse with Germans may be clearly traced. Here again we feel, and this time more forcibly, the approach of Romanticism, with its loathing of Protestantism, as unimaginative, uncultured, dry, and cold, and its steadily increasing affection for Catholicism, a faith whose æsthetic proclivities, and close and warm relations with imagination and art, gave it an unexpected new lease of life and power in the beginning of the nineteenth century, after the prosaic reasonableness of the "enlightenment" period. We have here a most distinct attack upon the France of the eighteenth century, which, with *Vo taire* at its head, had persecuted and scorned Catholicism, and which, without any love for Protestant dogma, had yet expressed a distinct preference for Protestantism, with its independence of Papal authority, its married clergy, and its hatred of the real or pretended renunciations of conventual life.

## XII

### NEW CONCEPTION OF THE ANTIQUE

THERE is another part of this book on Italy where the influence of Germany makes itself profoundly felt, and where we are also sensible of the transition from the creative mood which produced *Corinne* to that which produced the book on Germany. I refer to Corinne's conception of the antique and of the position in which modern art stands towards it. Reflections on this subject naturally suggested themselves when she was acting as Oswald's guide in Rome.

For Rome is the one place in the world where history is, as it were, visible. There successive ages have deposited their records in distinct layers. One sometimes comes upon a single building (one of the houses in the vicinity of the Temple of Vesta for example) in which the foundation belongs to one period of history, and each of the three superimposed stories to another—ancient Rome, imperial Rome, the Renaissance, and our own day. It is to the most ancient period that Corinne first introduces her friend. It must be confessed that while she looks at the ruins, he looks at her. But the significance of this part of the book lies in the fact that it introduces a new view of the antique into French literature.

Of the two great classic peoples, it was really only the Romans that were understood in France. Some Roman blood flows in Frenchmen's veins. A true Roman spirit breathes in Corneille's tragedies. It was, thus, not surprising that the great Revolution revived Roman customs, names, and costumes. Charlotte Corday, of the race of the great Corneille, is penetrated by the Roman spirit. Madame Roland moulded her mind by the study of Tacitus; and David, the painter of the Revolution, reproduced ancient Rome in his art—Brutus and Manlius are his heroes.

## THE EMIGRANT LITERATURE

But the Greeks had never been rightly understood. The French, indeed, still flattered themselves that their classical literature continued the tradition of Greek literature, and actually surpassed it; but since Lessing had written his *Hamburgische Dramaturgie* it had been no secret to the rest of Europe that Racine's Greeks were neither more nor less than so many Frenchmen; it had been discovered that Agamemnon's immortal family consisted of disguised marquises and marchionesses. It was of no avail that the costume had been altered in the Théâtre Français, that since Talma's day its Greeks had appeared in classic draperies instead of with perukes, powder, and small-swords; from the moment that the critical spirit awoke in Germany, the French conception of the antique became the jest of Europe.

It is Mme. de Staël who has the honour of being the first to introduce her fellow-countrymen, in her book on Germany, to the bold scoffer, Lessing, who had dared to make the arch-mocker himself, his own teacher and master, Voltaire, the butt of his wit, in this case sharpened by a personal grudge. She paves the way for doing so in *Corinne*, by making her heroine's conversation with Oswald a *résumé* of all the results produced in the mind of Germany by the new study of the antique, and by the doctrines propounded in *Laokoon* on the subject of the relation between poetry and sculpture.

In Germany too, a thoroughly French conception of Hellenism had prevailed, the conception apparent in Wieland's clever, frivolous romances, *Agathon* and *Aristippos*, and in his poems, *Endymion*, *Musarion*, &c., which are severely handled by Mme. de Staël in her book on Germany. But a new era had dawned. A poor German school-master, Winckelmann, inspired by genuine, pure enthusiasm, succeeded, after encountering innumerable difficulties, in making his way to Rome to study the antique. Against his convictions, and in spite of the opposition of his friends, he adopted the Catholic religion to facilitate his stay there. He eventually fell a victim to his love of art, for he was foully murdered by a scoundrel



WINCKELMANN



who wished to obtain possession of his collection of valuable coins and precious stones. It was this Winckelmann who, in a long series of writings, beginning with the appeal to the German nobility and ending with the great history of art, opened the eyes of his fellow-countrymen to the harmony of Greek art. His whole work as an author is one great hymn to the re-discovered, the recovered antique. All who are acquainted with his writings are aware that the Apollo Belvedere, the Venus of Medici, and the Laocoon group represented to him the supreme glory of Greek art; nor could it be otherwise, seeing that no work of art of the great style had as yet been discovered. The Teutonic neo-Hellenic development took place prior to the discovery of the Venus of Milo. Even Thorwaldsen was an old man when he first saw this statue. But in spite of this one great deficiency and of his many historical inaccuracies, it was from Winckelmann that the mighty influence went forth which inspired Lessing, Schiller, and Goethe. Lessing's work is a continuation of Winckelmann's. Endowed with an unrivalled critical faculty, he sketched the first plan of a science of art and poetry with Winckelmann's theory of art as a foundation. All who are familiar with Goethe's life know how great an influence these twin spirits, Winckelmann and Lessing, had upon his artistic development. The new, grand, genial conception of the antique finds its first expression in Goethe's sparkling little masterpiece, *Götter, Helden und Wieland*. I give a few specimen speeches. Wieland's ghost stands, nightcap on head, and is being utterly crushed in an argument with Admetus and Alcestis when Hercules appears.

*H.* Where is Wieland?

*A.* There he stands.

*H.* *That* he? He is small enough, certainly. Just what I had pictured him to myself. Are you the man that is always prating about Hercules?

*W.* (*shrinking away*). I have nothing to do with you, Colossus!

*H.* Eh! What? Don't go away.

*W.* I imagined Hercules to be a fine man of middle height.

*H.* Of middle height! I?

*W.* If you are Hercules, it was not you I meant.

*H.* That is my name and I am proud of it. I know very well that when a blockhead cannot find a suitable bear or griffin or boar to hold his scutcheon, he takes a Hercules. It is plain that my godhead has never revealed itself to you in a vision.

*W.* I confess this is the first vision of the kind that I have ever had.

*H.* Then take thought, and ask pardon of the gods for your notes to Homer, who makes us too tall for you.

*W.* In truth you are enormous; I never imagined anything like it.

*H.* Is it my fault, man, that you have such a narrow-chested imagination? What sort of a Hercules is the one you are for ever prating about, and what is it he fights for? For virtue? What's the motto again? Have you ever seen virtue, Wieland? I have been a good deal about in the world too, and I never yet met such a thing.

*W.* What! You do not know that virtue for which my Hercules does everything, ventures all?

*H.* Virtue! I heard the word for the first time down here from a couple of silly fellows who couldn't tell me what they meant by it.

*W.* No more could I. But don't let us waste words upon that. I wish you had read my poems; if you had, you would see that at bottom I don't care so very much about virtue myself—it is an ambiguous sort of thing.

*H.* It is a monstrosity, like every other phantasy which cannot exist in the world as we know it. Your virtue reminds me of a centaur. So long as it prances about in your imagination, how splendid it is, how strong! and when the sculptor represents it for you, what a superhuman form! But anatomise it, and you find four lungs, two hearts, and two stomachs. It dies at the moment of birth like any other monstrosity, or, to be more correct, it never existed anywhere but in your brain.<sup>1</sup>

*W.* But virtue must be something, must be somewhere.

*H.* By the eternal beard of my father, who doubted it? Meseems it dwelt with us, in demigods and heroes. Do you suppose we lived like brute beasts? We had splendid fellows among us.

*W.* What do you call splendid fellows?

*H.* Those who share what they have with others. And the richest was the best. If he had more muscular strength than he needed, he gave another man a good thrashing; and of course no good man and true will have anything to do with a weaker man than himself, only with his equals, or his superiors. If he had a superfluity of sap and vigour, he provided the women with as many children as they might

<sup>1</sup> It cannot be denied that this scientific, anti-mythological simile does not come well from Hercules. But the rest atones for it.

wish for—I myself begot fifty men-children in a single night. And if Heaven had given him goods and gold enough for a thousand, he opened his doors and bade a thousand welcome to enjoy it with him.

*W.* Most of this would be considered vice in our day.

*H.* Vice? that is another of your fine words! The very reason why everything is so poor and small with you is, that you represent virtue and vice as two extremes between which you oscillate, instead of thinking the middle course the ordained and best, as do your peasants and your men-servants and maid-servants.

*W.* Let me tell you that in my century you would be stoned for such opinions. See how they have denounced me for my little attack on virtue and religion.

*H.* And what had you to do attacking them? I have fought with horses, cannibals, and dragons, to the best of my ability, but never with clouds, what shape soever it pleased them to take. A sensible nfan leaves it to the winds that have blown them together to sweep them away again.

*W.* You are a monster, a blasphemer.

*H.* And you can't understand. Your Hercules stands like a beardless simpleton, hesitating between virtue and vice. If the two jades had met *me* on the way—see! one under this arm, one under that, off I'd have gone with them both.

Here we have Goethe's early and vigorous new conception of the antique contrasted with Wieland's Frenchified one; and we have at the same time the poetical confession of faith of the man whom his contemporaries called the Great Pagan. This is the philosophy of Spinoza in the form of a daring jest. But Goethe did not retain this bold, naturalistic view of the antique. When his youthful ardour had exhausted itself in *Werther*, in *Götz*, and in his enthusiastic treatise on Gothic architecture, he abruptly turned his back upon the Gothic and upon enthusiasm; and when he returns to the Greeks, it is their serenity and their lucidity, their simple harmonies and their sound common sense which captivate him. All that was passionate, full of colour, and realistic, he put aside and ignored; what was popular, burlesque, sensational, he only admitted in his allegorical farces, such as *Die klassische Walpurgisnacht* in *Faust*; and for what was wildly bacchantic or darkly mystical his eyes were closed.



With an increasing aversion for Christianity, which finds its chief expression in the Venetian Epigrams, was associated such a repugnance for the Gothic and all Christian art, that when he was at Assisi, a place so rich in famous Christian mementoes, Goethe did not even visit the beautiful Church of St. Francis, but devoted his attention exclusively to the insignificant ruins of the Temple of Minerva. It was in this frame of mind that he wrote his *Iphigenia*, a work which may be looked upon as typical of the whole Germanic-Gothic renaissance of the antique, and which played an important part in the formation of the art theories of the nineteenth century. It was regarded by German æstheticism under the leadership of Hegel, and by French æstheticism under the leadership of Taine, as a species of model work of art. Hegel considered that only the *Antigone* of Sophocles was worthy to be compared with it. The spirit by which it is inspired is the same spirit which inspired all Schiller's neo-Hellenic poems, *Die Götter Griechenlands*, *Die Künstler*, *Die Ideale*, *Das Ideal und das Leben*. Men were actually inclined at that time to accept, as representative of the life of the Greeks, Schiller's description of the life of the gods :

"Ewig klar und spiegelrein und eben  
Fliesst das zephyrleichte Leben  
Im Olymp den Seligen dahin."

It is this entirely one-sided conception of the antique which is gradually evolved from that expressed in *Götter*, *Helden und Wieland*, and which finally leads Goethe to write Homeric poems like *Achilleis*. Thorvaldsen's position to the antique is influenced by the same ideas and presents a succession of almost parallel movements. In some of his earliest bas-reliefs—Achilles and Briseis, for example—we observe that greater daring in the rendering of the antique with which Goethe started; but all his later representations of Greek subjects have been inspired by the ideal of peaceful, subdued harmony which superseded the vigorous tendency.

This new, Germanic-Gothic conception of Hellas is

that with which all my (Danish) readers have been brought up, which they have imbibed from conversation, from newspapers, from German and Danish poetry, and from the Thorvaldsen sculptures. It is the conception which with us is not only regarded as the Danish and German, but as the only, the absolutely correct one.

The view which I venture to express here for the first time is, that the Greece of Winckelmann, Goethe, and Thorvaldsen is *almost* as un-Greek as that of Racine and that of Barthélemy in *Le Jeune Anacharse*. Racine's style has too strong a flavour of the drawing-room and the court to be Greek; Goethe's and Thorvaldsen's (framed on Winckelmann's theories) is, in spite of the surpassing genius of these two great men, too chastened, too limpid, and too cold to be Greek.

I believe that the time will come when Goethe's Iphigenia will not be considered appreciably more Greek than Racine's, when it will be discovered that the German Iphigenia's dignified morality is as German as the French Iphigenia's graceful refinement is French. The only question that remains is, whether one is more Greek when one is German or when one is French. I am perfectly aware that I am dashing my head against a wall of Germanic-Gothic prejudice when I declare myself on the side of the French. I am not ignorant of the firmly-rooted conviction that of the two European streams of culture one is Latin, Spanish, French, the other Greek, German, Northern. I know of the plausible arguments, that German poetry with Goethe at its head has an antique bias, and is more or less Hellenic; that Germany has produced Winckelmann, the re-discoverer of the antique, and the philologists who have interpreted Greece to us; while France has only produced Racine, who turned the Greek demigods and heroes into French courtiers, and Voltaire, who considered Aristophanes a charlatan.

And yet, when in comparing the two Iphigenias I asked myself the question: Which of the two, the Frenchman's or the German's, more resembles the Greek? the answer I gave myself was—The Frenchman's.

The spirit of the French people resembles the Greek spirit in its absolute freedom from awkwardness, its love of lightness, elegance, form and colour, passion and dramatic life. No reasonable person would dream of ranking the French with the Greeks. The distance between them is so great as to be practically immeasurable. Still one must maintain their right to the place of honour against those who assert that the Germans stand nearer to the Greeks.

The Germans who more immediately influenced Mme. de Staël, the leaders of the Romantic School, cherished a firm conviction of the vanity of literary and artistic attempts to reproduce the antique. A. W. Schlegel perpetuated Lessing's antagonism to the so-called classical poetry of France, exalting at its expense the poetry of the Troubadours, which did not depend for support on Greek or Latin literature; and he was very much colder in his criticism of Goethe's neo-Hellenic poems than of those which dealt with more home-like and more varied themes. To such influence is to be ascribed Corinne's dictum (i. 321) that, since we cannot make our own either the religious feelings of the Greeks and Romans or their intellectual tendencies, it is impossible for us to produce anything in their spirit, to invent, so to speak, anything in their domain. We do not need the footnote referring to an essay by Fr. Schlegel to tell us whose suggestion the authoress has here followed. And we almost feel as if we were reading the work of one of the Romantic critics when, in *De l'Allemagne*, we come upon the following development of the same thought: "Even if the artists of our day were restricted to the simplicity of the ancients, it would be impossible for us to attain to the original vigour which distinguishes them, and we should lose that intensity and complexity of emotion which is only found with us. Simplicity in art is apt with us moderns to become coldness and unreality, whereas with the ancients it was full of life."<sup>1</sup>

I believe that this utterance hits the mark. And just as the German reproduction of the antique is German, so the Danish renaissance of the antique is Danish and not Greek;

<sup>1</sup> Madame de Staël: *Œuvres complètes*, x. 273.

that is to say, it is too Danish to be properly Greek, and too Greek to be genuinely Danish and really modern. One is never more conscious of this than when one sees a work of Thorvaldsen's side by side with an antique bas-relief; when, for instance, one compares the Christiansborg medallions with the metopes of the Parthenon, or, as in the Naples Museum, sees a bas-relief of the most vigorous Greek period beside Thorvaldsen's most beautiful bas-relief, his "Night."

Thorvaldsen's "Night" is only the stillness of night, the night in which men sleep. Night, as a Greek would conceive of it, the night in which men love, in which they murder, the night which hides under its mantle voluptuousness and crime, it certainly is not. It is a mild summer night in the country. And it is this idyllic spirit and sweet serenity which is the specially Danish characteristic of this production of the Northern renaissance of the antique. The peculiar rustic beauty of the charming figure is as essentially Danish as the severe grandeur and nobility of Goethe's *Iphigenia* are German.

Like Goethe's, Thorvaldsen's revival of the antique is the expression of a reaction against the French-Italian rococo style, which, in spite of its justifiableness, was not a successful reaction. For, even where the rococo style is most ridiculous, there is always this to be said for it, that it has the strongest objection to repeat the old, to do over again what has already been done, and that, though its attempts frequently result in ugliness and distortion, they nevertheless evince a passionate, personal endeavour to find something new, something that shall be its own. Hence Bernini, in spite of his sins against truth and beauty, is really great in his best works, such as his *St. Theresa* in *Santa Maria della Vittoria* in Rome, and his *St. Benedict* at *Subiaco*—so great that we understand the enthusiasm he aroused, and feel that he far excels many modern sculptors, who never produce anything distorted, but also never produce anything original.

By his abrupt return to the antique, Thorvaldsen as it were ignored the whole development of art since the days of

the Greeks. It would be impossible to divine from his work that such a sculptor as Michael Angelo had ever lived. He was drawn to the antique by precisely the same qualities which attracted Goethe—its serenity and quiet grandeur.

It is possible to share Mme. de Staël's and the Romantics' view that the neo-Hellenic style in modern art (that offspring of a disinclination to be one's self, *i.e.* modern, and an attempt to be the impossible, *i.e.* antique) is in itself an abortion—exactly as the Romantics' own medieval hieratic style was one—and at the same time, without any self-contradiction, warmly to admire Goethe's *Iphigenia* and Thorvaldsen's finest works. This is, indeed, only what the German Romantics and Mme. de Staël herself did. But Mme. de Staël has failed to observe, that in every case, in which a work that is the result of the study of the antique is a work of real, lasting importance, it is so because the artist's or poet's national character and personal peculiarities show distinctly through the more refined, but less robust, classicism which is the result of his endeavour.

The attacks made in *Corinne* and *De l'Allemagne* upon spurious classicism were an expression, in the first instance, of the reaction against the eighteenth century ; but, so far as France was concerned, they applied also to an earlier period, were attacks upon the great names of the seventeenth century, of the classic period of Louis XIV., which A. W. Schlegel, following in Lessing's steps, had so severely criticised. Here, where Mme. de Staël was running the risk of wounding French national pride, she shows all possible circumspection, only repeats the remarks of others, and qualifies where she can. She justly maintains, however, that the spirit of this criticism is not un-French, since it is the same as that which inspires Rousseau's Letter on French Music, the same accusation of having supplanted natural expression of the emotions by a certain pompous affectation.

When the Germans of those days desired to give a tangible example of the French conception of the antique, they pointed to the portraits of Louis XIV., in which he is represented now as Jupiter, now as Hercules, naked or with a lion's hide thrown over his shoulders, but never without his

great wig. But when Madame de Staël, following their example, praises German Hellenism at the expense of French, she scarcely does her countrymen justice. The art of David had already proved that Frenchmen were capable of discarding the periwig without foreign suggestion. Besides, she over-estimates German neo-Hellenism. There is no doubt that the Germans, whose literature is so critical, whose modern poetry is actually an offspring of criticism and æstheticism, have understood the Greeks far better than the French have done, and that this understanding has been of value in their imitation of them. But one never resembles an original nature less than when one imitates it. The Germans favour restriction and moderation in all practical matters, but are opposed to the restriction of either thought or imagination. Therefore they triumph where plastic form vanishes—in metaphysics, in lyrical poetry, and in music; but therefore also there are conjectures in their science, their art is formless, colour is their weak point in painting, and the drama in poetry. In other words, they lack exactly that plastic talent which the Greeks possessed in the highest degree. If France is far from being a Greece in art, Germany is still farther. Of all the gods and goddesses of ancient Greece, the Germans have only succeeded in acclimatising one—Pallas Athene, and in Germany she wears spectacles. Mme. de Staël might have observed to Schlegel that an Athene with spectacles is not much more beautiful than a Jupiter with a wig.

### XIII

#### DE L'ALLEMAGNE

THE strongly opposed and long suppressed book on Germany is the most mature production of Mme. de Stael's culture and intellect. It is the first of her longer works in which she so entirely loses herself in her subject as to have apparently forgotten her own personality. In it she gives up describing herself, and only appears to the extent that she gives an account of her travels in Germany and reproduces her conversations with the most remarkable men of that country. In place of self-defence and self-exaltation, she offers her countrymen a comprehensive view of a whole new world. The last information Frenchmen had received regarding the intellectual life of Germany was, that there was a king in Berlin who dined every day in the company of French savants and poets, who sent his indifferent French verse to be corrected by Voltaire, and who refused to acknowledge the existence of a German literature. And now, not so many years later, they learned that this same country, which their conquering armies were in the act of treading under foot, had, in the course of a single generation, produced, as if by magic, a great and instructive literature, which some had the audacity to rank with the French, if not above it. The book gave a complete, comprehensive picture of this foreign intellectual life and literary production. It began with a description of the appearance of the country and its towns ; it noted the contrasts between the character of Northern and of Southern Germany, between the tone and morals of Berlin and of Vienna ; it gave information on the subject of German university education, and of the new life which Pestalozzi had imparted to the training of children. From this it passed on to a general survey of con-

temporary German poetry, made doubly intelligible by many translations of poems and fragments of drama ; and the authoress did not even flinch from putting the climax to her work by giving a sketch of the evolution of German philosophy from Kant to Schelling.

The impressions of German naïveté, good-nature, and straightforwardness which prevailed in France until 1870 were due to Mme. de Staël's book. She made the acquaintance of the people who had caused Europe to resound with the clash of their arms throughout the Thirty Years' War and during the reign of Frederick the Great, at the moment of its deepest political and military degradation, and this led her to conclude that the national character was peaceful and idyllic. It seemed to her that the warmth of the stoves and the fumes of ale and tobacco gave the atmosphere in which this people moved a peculiar, heavy, dull quality ; and it was her opinion that their strength lay exclusively in their earnest morality and their intellectual independence.

She never wearies of praising the integrity and truthfulness of the German men, and only very occasionally does she hint at a pretty general lack of refinement and tact. We feel that their conversation often wearied her, but for this she blames the social customs and the language. It is impossible, she says, to express one's self neatly in a language in which one's meaning as a rule only becomes intelligible at the end of the sentence, in which, consequently, the interruptions which give life to a conversation are almost impossible, it being also impossible always to reserve the pith of the sentence for the end. It is natural, she thinks, that a foreigner should sometimes be bored by the conversation in a society where the listeners are so unexact and so patient ; where no one consequently has that dread of boring which prevents circumlocution and repetitions. Even the custom of perpetually repeating insignificant and lengthy titles necessarily makes conversation formal and cumbersome.

The German women she describes with warm sympathy, but not without a touch of sarcasm, as follows :—

“ They have an attraction peculiarly their own, touching



voices, fair hair, dazzling complexions ; they are modest, but less timid than Englishwomen ; one can see that they less frequently meet men who are their superiors. They seek to please by their sensibility, to interest by their imagination, and are familiar with the language of poetry and of the fine arts. They play the coquette with their enthusiasms as Frenchwomen do with their *esprit* and merry wit. The perfect loyalty distinctive of the German character makes love less dangerous to women's happiness, and possibly they approach the feeling with more confidence because it has been invested for them with romantic colours, and because slights and infidelity are less to be dreaded here than elsewhere. Love is a religion in Germany, but a poetic religion, which only too readily permits all that the heart can find excuse for.

"One may fairly laugh at the ridiculous airs of some German women, who are so habitually enthusiastic that enthusiasm has with them become mere affectation, their mawkish utterances effacing any piquancy or originality of character they may possess. They are not frankly straightforward like Frenchwomen, which by no means implies that they are false ; but they are not capable of seeing and judging things as they really are ; actual events pass like a phantasmagoria before their eyes. Even when, as occasionally happens, they are frivolous, they still preserve a touch of that sentimentality which in their country is held in high esteem. A German lady said to me one day with a melancholy expression : 'I do not know how it is, but the absent pass out of my soul.' A Frenchwoman would have expressed the idea more gaily, but the meaning would have been the same.

"Their careful education and their natural purity of soul render the dominion they exercise gentle and abiding. But that intellectual agility which animates conversation and sets ideas in motion is rare among German women."

Mme. de Staël was necessarily much impressed by the intellectual life of Germany. In her own country everything had stiffened into rule and custom. There, a decrepit poetry and philosophy were at the point of death ; here,

everything was in a state of fermentation, full of new movement, life, and hope.

The first difference between the French and the German spirit which struck her was their different attitude to society. In France the dominion exercised by society was absolute ; the French people were by nature so social that every individual at all times felt bound to act, to think, to write like every one else. The Revolution of 1789 was spread from district to district merely by sending couriers with the intelligence that the nearest town or village had taken up arms. In Germany, on the contrary, there was no society ; there existed no universally accepted rules of conduct, no desire to resemble every one else, no tyrannical laws of language or poetry. Each author wrote as he pleased, for his own satisfaction, paying little heed to that reading world around which all the thoughts of the French writer revolved. In Germany the author created his public, whereas in France the public, the fashion of the moment, moulded the author. In Germany it was possible for the thought of the individual to exercise that power over men's minds which in France is exercised exclusively by public opinion. At the time when the French philosopher was a society man, whose great aim was to present his ideas in clear and attractive language, a German thinker, living isolated from the culture of his time at far-away Königsberg, revolutionised contemporary thought by a couple of thick volumes written in a language saturated with the most difficult technical terms. A woman who had suffered all her life from the oppression of a narrow-minded social spirit could not but feel enthusiasm for such conditions as these.

The next great contrast with French intellectual life that struck Mme. de Staël was the prevailing idealism of German literature. The philosophy which had reigned in France during the last half of the eighteenth century was one which derived all human ideas and thoughts from the impressions of the senses, which, consequently, asserted the human mind to be dependent upon and conditioned by its material surroundings. It was certainly not in Mme. de Staël's power to estimate the nature and the bearing of this philo-

sophy, but, like a genuine child of the new century, she loathed it. She judged it like a woman, with her heart rather than her head, and ascribed to it all the materialism she objected to in French morals, and all the servile submission to authority she objected to in French men. Taking Condillac's sensationalism in combination with the utilitarianism of Helvetius, she pronounced the opinion that no doctrine was more adapted to paralyse the soul in its ardent, upward endeavour than this, which derived all good from properly understood self-interest. With genuine delight she saw the opposite doctrine universally accepted in Germany. The ethics of Kant and Fichte and the poetry of Schiller proclaimed exactly that sovereignty of the spirit in which she had believed all her life. These great thinkers demonstrated, that inspired poet in each of his poems proved, the spirit's independence of the world of matter, its power to rise above it, to rule it, to remould it. They expressed the most cherished convictions of her heart; and it was in her enthusiasm for these doctrines, for German high-mindedness and loftiness of aspiration, that she set to work to write her book *De l'Allemagne* (as Tacitus in his day had written *De Germania*), for the purpose of placing before her fellow-countrymen a great example of moral purity and intellectual vigour.

Mme. de Staël had always looked upon enthusiasm as a saving power. She had said in *Corinne* that she only recognised two really distinct classes of men—those who are capable of enthusiasm and those who despise enthusiasts. It seemed to her that in the Germany of that day she had found the native land of enthusiasm, the country in which it was a religion, where it was more highly honoured than anywhere else on earth. Hence it is that she ends her book with a dissertation on enthusiasm. But this belief in enthusiasm, in the power of imagination and the purely spiritual faculties, led her to many rash and narrow conclusions. In her delight in the philosophic idealism of Germany, she treats experimental natural science with the most naïve superiority—is of opinion that it leads to nothing but a mechanical accumulation of facts. *Naturphilosophie*, on the other hand, which has made the discovery that the human

mind can derive all knowledge from itself by the conclusions of reason—which, in other words, regards all things as formed after the pattern of the human mind—seems to her the wisdom of Solomon. "It is a beautiful conception," she says, "that which finds a resemblance between the laws of the human mind and the laws of nature, and which looks upon the material world as an image of the spiritual." In her pleasure in the beauty of this idea she fails to perceive how untruthful it is, to foresee how barren of all result it is soon to prove. She extols Franz Baader and Steffens at the expense of the great English scientists, and, following the example of her Romantic friends, has a good word to say for clairvoyance and astrology—for every phenomenon, in short, which seems to prove the prevailing power of the spirit.

\* Many years before this a French pamphlet written against Mme. de Staël had been entitled *L'Antiromantique*. Her Romantic tendency had in the interval become more and more marked. Spiritualism, as such, seemed to her the good, the beautiful, the true, both in art and in philosophy. This explains both her over-indulgence towards the abortions of the Romantic school, especially the dramas of her friend Zacharias Werner, and her misunderstanding of Goethe, whose greatness rather alarms than delights her, and whom she now excuses, now quotes with the remark that she cannot defend the spirit of his works. She prefaces her prose translation of *Die Braut von Corinth* with the words: "I can certainly neither defend the aim of the poem nor the poem itself, but it seems to me that no one can fail to be impressed by its fantastic power;" and she concludes her otherwise excellent criticism of the first part of *Faust* with these words: "This drama of 'Faust' is certainly not a model work. Whether we look upon it as the outcome of a poetic frenzy or of the life-weariness of the worshipper of reason, *our hope is that such productions will not repeat themselves*;" adding only by way of compensation a remark on Goethe's genius and the wealth of thought displayed in the work. Thus irresistibly was even such a mind as hers affected by the spirit of the day in her native country, with its tendency to religious reaction. In the intellectual life of Germany she

had perception and sympathy for Romanticism alone; German pantheism she neither sympathised with nor understood ; it alarmed her ; the daring spirit which had sounded so many abysses, recoiled tremblingly from the verge of this one.

And yet here lay the key to the whole new intellectual development in Germany. Behind Lessing's brilliant attack upon ecclesiastical dogma there had lain, unperceived by his contemporaries, the philosophy of Spinoza. Immediately after the great critic's death the literary world received a double surprise. The controversy between Mendelssohn and Jacobi elicited the appalling fact that Lessing had lived and died a Spinozist, and also showed that even Jacobi himself was of the opinion that all philosophy logically carried out must inevitably lead to Spinozism and pantheism. He endeavoured to extricate himself from the difficulty by pointing out that there is another way of arriving at knowledge of the truth than by conclusive argument, namely, the way of direct intuitive perception. But from this time onwards pantheism was in the air, and from the moment that Goethe, enraptured by his first reading of Spinoza, declares himself a Spinozist (a faith from which he never wavered to the end of his long life), it reigns in German literature ; and this spirit of the new age, with its rich dower of poetry and philosophic thought, weds that antique beauty which has been brought to life again ; as Faust, in the most famous poetical work of the period, weds Helen of Troy, who symbolises ancient Greece.

The great pagan renaissance which had been inaugurated in Italy by such men as Leonardo and Giordano Bruno, and in England by such men as Shakespeare and Bacon, now finds its way to Germany, and the new intellectual tendency is strengthened by the enthusiasm for pagan-Greek antiquity awakened by Winckelmann and Lessing. Schiller writes *Die Götter Griechenlands*, Goethe, *Die Diana der Epheser* and *Die Braut von Corinth*. After the glory of Greece had departed, a mariner, voyaging along her coast by night, heard from the woods the cry : "Great Pan is dead !" But Pan was not dead ; he had only fallen asleep. He awoke again in Italy at the time of the Renaissance ; he was acknowledged

and worshipped as a living god in the Germany of Schelling, Goethe, and Hegel.

The new German spirit was even more pantheistic than the antique spirit. When the ancient Greek stood by some beautiful waterfall, like that of Tibur near Rome, he endowed what he saw with personality. His eye traced the contours of beautiful naked women, the nymphs of the place, in the falling waters of the cascade; the wreathing spray was their waving hair; he heard their merry splashing and laughter in the rush of the stream and the dashing of the foam against the rocks. In other words, impersonal nature became personal to the antique mind. The poet of old did not understand nature; his own personality stood in the way; he saw it reflected everywhere, saw *persons* wherever he looked.

Precisely the opposite is the case with a great modern poet like Goethe or Tieck, whose whole emotional life is pantheistic. He, as it were, strips himself of his personality in order to understand nature. When he in his turn stands by the waterfall, he bursts the narrow bonds of *self*. He feels himself glide and fall and spin round with the whirling waters. His whole being streams out of the narrow confines of the Ego and flows away with the stream he is gazing on. His elastic consciousness widens, he absorbs unconscious nature into his being; he forgets himself in what he sees, as those who listen to a symphony are lost in what they hear. It is the same with everything. As his being flows with the waves, so it flies and moans with the winds, sails with the moon through the heavens, feels itself one with the formless universal life.

This was the pantheism which Goethe indicated in the biting epigram:—

“Was soll mir euer Hohn  
Ueber das All und Eine?  
Der Professor ist eine Person,  
Gott ist keine.”

This was the pantheism to which he gave expression in *Faust*, and which lies so deeply rooted in the German nature that even the Romantic school, with its antagonism to the

revival of the antique and its secret leaning to Catholicism, is as pantheistic as Hölderlin and Goethe. The worship of the universe is the unchecked undercurrent which forces its way through all the embankments and between all the stones with which an attempt is made to stay it.

Mme. de Staël did not perceive this. Her German acquaintances drew her with them into the movement that was going on upon the surface, and she saw and felt nothing else. This surface movement was the Romantic reaction.

The violent attempt to be that which was really unnatural in the modern German, namely antique and classical, produced a violent counter-movement. Goethe's and Schiller's ever more determined and strict adherence to the antique ideal in art led them at last, in their attachment to severity and regularity of style, to take a step in the direction of that school against which they had been the first to rebel, namely French classical tragedy. Goethe translated Voltaire's *Mahomet*, and Schiller, Racine's *Phèdre*; and thus, through the action of these two greatest of German poets, the French and the German conception of the classical entered into league with one another. But this alliance, as was inevitable, gave the signal for revolt. The antique was so severe; men longed for colour and variety. It was so plastic; they longed for something fervent and musical. The antique was so Greek, so cold, so foreign; who had the patience to read Goethe's *Achilleis*, or Schiller's *Die Braut von Messina*, with its solemn antique chorus? Had they not a past of their own? They longed for something national, something German. The antique was so aristocratic; enthusiasm for the classical had actually led to the revival of the old court poetry of the period of Louis XIV. But surely art should be for all classes, should unite high and low? Men wanted something simple, something popular.

These classical efforts were, in the last place, so very dull. Lessing's genial rational religion had, under the treatment of Nicolai the bookseller, turned into the same sort of insipid rationalism which was in favour in Denmark at the close of the century. Goethe's pantheism could not warm the hearts of the masses. Schiller's *Die Sendung Moses* could

not but be an offence to every believer. And after all, the word "poetic" did not necessarily mean "dull." Men wanted to be roused, to be intoxicated, to be inspired; they wanted once again to believe like children, to feel the enthusiasm of the knight, the rapture of the monk, the frenzy of the poet, to dream melodious dreams, to bathe in moonlight and hold mystic communion with the spirits of the Milky Way; they wanted to hear the grass grow and to understand what the birds sang, to penetrate into the depths of the moonlit night, and into the loneliness of the forest.

It was something simple that was wanted. Weary of ancient culture, men took refuge in the strange, rich, long-neglected world of the Middle Ages. A thirst for the fantastic and marvellous took possession of their souls, and fairy-tale and myth became the fashion. All the old, popular fairy-tales and legends were collected, and were re-written and imitated, often as excellently as by Tieck in his *Fair Eckbert* and *Story of the Beautiful Magelone* and *Count Peter of Provence*, but also often with a childish magnification of the poetical value of superstitions which in reality possess only scientific value as distorted remains of ancient myths. Novalis, in a spirited poem, prophesied that the time would come when man would no longer look to science to solve the riddles of life, but would find the explanation of all in fairy tale and poetry; and when that time came, when the mystic word was spoken, all perversity and foolishness and wrong would vanish. All foolishness and wrong, all that the French Revolution in its foolhardiness had sought to put an end to by wild destruction and bloody wars, was to vanish as in a dream or a fairy-tale, at the sound of a spoken word, when men had become children again! They were to be regenerated by turning from ideas that were redolent of powder and blood to ideas redolent of the nursery.

It was something popular that was wanted. The seed was sown of the same popular movement which was started in Denmark by Grundtvig, after he, like so many others, had been powerfully impressed by the youthful ardour with which the doctrines of the new Romantic School were proclaimed by Steffens and received by the rising generation,



in those days when there was still youth in Denmark. Men rightly regretted the great gulf which had been fixed between the educated and the uneducated by the extremely rapid advance of the vanguard and the exclusion of the poorer classes from culture, and rightly appealed to the man of science and the artist to clothe their thoughts and feelings in the simplest and most easily comprehensible form. But the movement went astray, by making the insane attempt to recall the advanced guard for the sake of the laggards; they would hardly have minded sabring the foremost for the sake of keeping the army together.

With the renunciation of the mainspring of action—belief in progress—the fatalistic tragedy, with its follies and superstitions, came into vogue. In Werner's tragedy, *The Twenty-Fourth of February*, whatever happens on that particular day reminds the heroine of a terrible crime and curse. This is carried so far that when a hen is killed that day, she cries: "It seemed to scream a curse at me; it reminded me of my father with the death-rattle in his throat." Yet this play is praised by that usually discerning critic, the authoress of *De l'Allemagne*! The affectedly childlike tone of the satirical dramas gave them the character of puppet plays; naïveté became more and more the fashion; in their terror of the salons of the eighteenth century men took refuge in the nursery.

The leaders of the school were Protestants by birth, but their bias towards the pious simplicity of the Middle Ages of necessity brought about a movement in the direction of Catholicism.

In that essay on the difference between neo-classical and popular art by which Mme. de Staël showed herself influenced both in *Corinne* and *De l'Allemagne*, Friedrich Schlegel, after demonstrating that it is impossible for genius to preserve its freshness, its impetuosity, when it chooses subjects the treatment of which demands erudition and exercise of the memory, observes: "It is not so with the subjects which belong to our own religion. From them artists receive inspiration; they feel what they paint; they paint what they have seen; life itself is their model when

they represent life. But when they attempt to return to the antique, they must seek what they are to reproduce, not in the life they see around them, but in books and pictures."

The false implication lies in the words "our own religion." Which was "our own religion"? Protestantism had developed into an idealistic philosophy that had long made common cause with the Revolution. In the year 1795, two young men, whose names were to attain world-wide celebrity, had gone out to a lonely field and, in their naive enthusiasm for the Revolution, planted a Tree of Liberty. These two were Schelling and Hegel.

There was, then, a return to Catholicism. But the spirit of Italian Catholicism was still too classic, too antique. A huge, light church like St. Peter's at Rome was not sufficiently mysterious; it was, as Lamartine observed, fitted, when all dogmatic religion should have disappeared from Europe, to become the temple of humanity. In Italy it was with the pre-Raphaelite painters alone that the Romanticists felt themselves akin; in Spain they found a kindred spirit in Calderon, whose mysticism they soon set high above their earlier favourite, Shakespeare's, realism and liberal-mindedness. Even Heiberg ranks Calderon above Shakespeare. There is a regular cult of the Gothic in art. Men turn with renewed admiration to the great monuments of their native land, to that style begotten of the deep feeling and the superstitious terrors of northern barbarians—Frenchmen, however. Albert Dürer, genuinely German, popular, simple-minded, but above all (with his stags bearing crosses between their antlers, and all the rest of his symbolical fancies) mystic, was canonised by the German Romanticists; even with us, Oehlenschläger and his sister persisted in seeing more in Dürer than other people could see. The infection was so universal that even the poet of the *Gulnares*, Alis, and Gulhyndis imagined himself a devotee of mysticism. Men's hearts were certainly not agitated by the religious agonies and hopes of the old pious times; but the strangeness of the Gothic style, and the extravagance which betrays itself in its artistic symbolism, harmonised with

the unnaturalness and restlessness of their morbid modern imaginations. It may be related, as not without significance, that when Oehlenschläger first came into the presence of the leaders of the Romantic School, in whom he had naïvely expected to find a set of eager, emaciated ascetics, he was somewhat taken aback by the sight of Friedrich Schlegel's "satirical fat face shining cheerfully at him."

It was, however, in the course of the ardent struggle against the neo-classical tendency that Friedrich Schlegel rendered his one true, and also really great, service to science: he introduced the study of Sanscrit, and thereby opened up to Europeans an entirely new intellectual domain. He laid the foundation, first of one new linguistic science, the Indo-Oriental, which henceforth developed alongside of the Greco-Roman, and then of a second, namely, comparative philology.

For the moment it was Hindu indolence, the contemplative life, the plant life, that was the ideal. It is this ideal which is extolled in Schlegel's *Lucinde* and which somewhat later is appropriated by the French Romanticists, re-appearing with variations in Théophile Gautier's *Fortunio*. We trace it in Oehlenschläger's inspired idler, Aladdin, and it is the ideal always present to the mind of the æsthete in *Enten-Eller*, who, like Kierkegaard himself, was brought up on the German Romanticists. Note his words: "I divide my time thus: half the time I sleep, the other half I dream. When I sleep I never dream, for to sleep is the highest achievement of genius."

Goethe, as an old man, sought refuge in the East from the turmoil of the day, and wrote his *West-östlicher Divan*. The Romanticists did but follow in his track. Presently, however, their doctrines were placed on a philosophical basis by Schelling, who had been alarmed and converted by the religious and political aberrations of the French. As Goethe had sought refuge in far-off Asia, Schelling sought refuge from discordant surroundings in the far-off past, and discovered there the sources of life and truth. In contradiction to the belief of the "enlightenment" period that humanity had laboriously raised itself from barbarism to culture, from

instinct to reason, he maintained that it had fallen—fallen, that is to say, from a higher state in which its education had been superintended by higher beings, spiritual powers. There was a fall ; and in the degenerate times following upon that fall, there appeared but few of those teachers, those higher beings, prophets, geniuses of the Schelling type, who strove to lead men back to the old, perfect life. We of to-day know that science has justified the pre-Revolutionists and proved Schelling wrong ; we, who live in the age of Charles Darwin, no longer accept the possibility of an original state of perfection and a fall. There is no doubt that the teaching of Darwin means the downfall of orthodox ethics, exactly as the teaching of Copernicus meant the downfall of orthodox dogma. The system of Copernicus deprived the heaven of the Church of its “local habitation” ; the Darwinian system will despoil the Church of its Paradisaic Eden.

But in those days this was not recognised, and Schelling directed men back to that primeval world whose myths of gods and demigods were to him historical facts ; he ended by extolling mythology as the greatest of all works of art, one which was capable of infinite interpretation ; and infinite in this context means arbitrary. We have here the germ of Grundtvig’s myth-interpretation—with its unscientific and untrustworthy presentment of Scandinavian mythology.

But the loss of all interest in the life of the day is still more markedly shown in Schelling’s absorption in nature. As the mystics held that it was the working of the imagination of God which created the world, so Schelling held that it was the corresponding power in man which alone gave ideal reality to the productions of his intellect.

It is, then, this essentially artistic force, the so-called “intellectual intuition” (which may be defined as the entire imagination working according to the laws of reason), of which Schelling, clearly influenced by the æsthetic criticism of the day, maintains that it alone opens the door to philosophy, to the perception of the identity of thought and reality. Nay, this “intellectual intuition” was not only the means, it was the end. This confusing of the tool with the work marks the beginning of a general, complete con-

fusion in Romantic poetry and philosophy. Philosophy begins to encroach on the domain of art ; instead of research we have fancy and conjecture ; poetry and the fine arts, on the other hand, invade the domain of philosophy and religion ; poems become rhymed discussions and their heroes booted and spurred ideas ; works of art seek vainly to disguise their lack of corporeal form by a cloak of Catholic piety and love. Men imagined that the new *Naturphilosophie* was to make all experimental study of nature superfluous henceforth and for ever ; but we, who have seen the absolute impotence of the *Naturphilosophie*, and who live in an age in which experimental science has changed the aspect of the earth and enriched human life by unparalleled discoveries and inventions—we know that in this case also reactionary endeavours led to defeat, and that life itself undertook the refutation of the fallacy. The interest of the above doctrine to us Danes lies especially in its energetic vindication of the divine imagination as the source of creation, and of the human imagination as the source of all artistic production ; for here we have the idea that gave birth to Aladdin, and feel the heart-beat which in 1803 drove the blood straight to that extremity of the great Germanic-Gothic body which is known by the name of Copenhagen.

It is easy to understand how inevitable it was that these new theories should make a strong impression on Oehlenschläger. The Romantics exalted imagination above everything in the world—it was the peculiarly divine gift. Whom could this impress more than the man through whom inventive power had in Danish literature supplanted the clever manipulation of language which had distinguished Baggesen and the eighteenth century ? The Romantics looked upon the world of myth as the highest, as the real world ; there he was, with a whole new mythology, the Scandinavian, ready to his hand, waiting to be used. Fr. Schlegel and Novalis had cried in chorus : “ We must find a mythology which can be to us what the mythology of the Greeks and Romans was to them ! ” But they sought in vain, or found only the old Catholic legends. Oehlenschläger alone had no need to

seek ; "the orange fell into his turban." The Romanticists believed in a greater past from which the race had fallen ; and he dwelt among a people whose past far outshone its present, a people that desired to forget the darkness of to-day and to see itself glorified in the glorification of the dreams of its childhood and the achievements of its youth. Thus it was that it only needed a word from Steffens to break (to the surprise of Steffens and every one else) the spell by which his tongue was tied.

It was one of the unmistakable deserts of the Romantic School that it endeavoured to widen the narrow circle of subjects provided by classical literature, and to teach men to appreciate what was admirable and characteristic in modern foreign nations as well as in their own country. This made the school a patriotic school, and patriotic in every country. It is to be observed that there already existed in Germany that inclination to make excursions into foreign regions which characterised French Romanticism in the days of Victor Hugo. We notice it first in Herder, with his admirable appreciation of the characteristically national intellectual productions of different countries. Then came A. W. Schlegel, with his criticism and translations. Schlegel's famous lectures on dramatic literature, published just before the entry of the Powers into Paris, expound the Greek, English, and Spanish drama sympathetically, but contain the most violent, bitter attacks upon French taste and the French drama. Not content with attacking the tragedians, he treats even Molière with foolish contempt. It is instructive to compare this book with Mme. de Staël's *De l'Allemagne*. Schlegel's misunderstanding and dislike of France are as great as Mme. de Staël's understanding and appreciation of Germany. He makes amends by expounding both Shakespeare and his own discovery, Calderon, with profound and subtle sympathy. His criticism of these two poets has, however, along with one great merit, one great defect.

The merit is, that every characteristic, however small, has justice done to it. Schlegel's own masterly translations of many of Shakespeare's and some of Calderon's plays show what progress has been made in the comprehension of

foreign poetry since Schiller, in his translation of *Macbeth*, cut up the play to suit the classical fancies of the day, and in so doing cut away all its boldness and realism.

The defect, which is the defect of the whole school (and in Denmark does not pass away with the school, but is to be observed in the following period too), lies in the conception of poetry, which, marked by German one-sidedness, is so sweepingly transcendental that it quite shuts out the historical interpretation. One model, unquestioned, absolute, follows the other. The French had found their models in the Greeks and Aristotle; now it is, say, Shakespeare who is alone absolutely worthy of imitation in poetry, Mozart (as Kierkegaard maintains in *Enten-Eller*) who is the perfect model in music. The sober, trustworthy, historical view of the matter, which recognises no perfect models, is entirely disregarded. The great work is the model for a whole new style, is in itself a code of laws. To our Heiberg, for instance, *St. Hansaften-Spil* is "the perfect realisation of the drama proper in lyrical form." Instead of studying poetry in connection with history, with the whole of life, men evolve systems in which schools of poetry and poetic works grow out of each other like branches on a tree. They believe, for instance, that English tragedy is descended in a direct line from Greek tragedy, not perceiving that the tragedy of one nation is not the offspring of that of other nations, but the production of the environment, the civilisation, the intellectual life in the midst of which it comes into being.

But, in the meantime, barriers were broken down, the world lay open to the poet's gaze, and he was free to choose his subject wherever his fancy led him. We have in our own literature a spirited confession of this new faith in Oehlen-schlager's beautiful poem, *Digterens Hjem* (*The Home of the Poet*)—

"Det strækker sig fra Spitzbergs hvide Klipper,  
For Syndflods ældste Lig en hellig Grav,  
Til hvor den sidste Tange slipper  
I Söndrepolens öde Hav."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> It stretches from the white cliffs of Spitzbergen, the grave of that which walked the earth before the flood, to where the last sea-wrack vanishes in the dreary waters round the Southern Pole.

This was the emancipating watchword sounded by the Romantic critic.

The brief résumé here given of the aims of the school which was flourishing in Germany at the time *De l'Allemagne* was written, has already indicated to the reader the points upon which Mme. de Staël was in sympathy with this school, and how far it may be said to have influenced the direction of her later literary career. The strenuous opposition of the Romanticists to the philosophy of the eighteenth century had her full sympathy; Schelling himself had called his whole system a reaction against the enlightening, clarifying processes of the age of reason. Their profound respect for poetic inspiration and their broad-mindedness harmonised with her own tendencies and prejudices. The Romantic doctrine of the all-importance of imagination won her approbation, but the Romanticists' conception of the nature of imagination was incomprehensible to her. They started from the hypothesis that at the foundation of everything lay a perpetually producing imagination, a species of juggling imagination, which with divine irony perpetually destroyed its own creations as the sea engulfs its own billows; and they held that the poet, that creator on a small scale, should take up the same ironical position towards the creatures of his imagining, towards his whole work, and deliberately destroy the illusion of it. Mme. de Staël had too practical a mind to be able to accept this far-fetched theory, on the subject of which she had many hot arguments with her Romantic friends. But on another very important point she was in harmony with them :

Like all the authors involved in the first reaction against the eighteenth century, she became as time went on more and more positively religious. The philosophical ideas of the revolutionary times were gradually effaced in her mind, and their place was supplied by ever more serious attempts to imbue herself with the new pious ideas of the day. She, who in her youth had eagerly controverted Chateaubriand's theory of the superiority of Christian subjects in art, now becomes a convert to his æsthetic views. She accepts unreservedly the Romanticist doctrine that modern



poetry and art must build upon Christianity, as the antique had built upon the Greco-Roman mythology ; and, living, listening, talking herself into ever greater certainty that the eighteenth century was completely astray, and constantly meeting men who have returned to the pious belief of the past, she finally herself comes to believe that idealism in philosophy, which to her, as a woman, is the good principle, and inspiration in poetry, which to her, as an authoress, is the saving, emancipating principle, must necessarily restore its authority to revealed religion, seeing that sensationalism, the principles of which in both philosophy and art are antipathetic to her, has opposed religion as an enemy. Thus it is that in her book on Germany she actually comes to range herself on the side of that passionate, prejudiced, and often painfully narrow reaction against the eighteenth-century spirit of intellectual liberty, which had broken out on the other side of the Rhine, and was to reach its climax in France itself.

## XIV

### BARANTE

MME. DE STAËL'S book on Germany was a glance into the future, a glimpse of what was going on beyond the frontiers of France ; it was in many ways a prophecy of the nature of the literature of the nineteenth century. But the group of writers to which she belonged would have left its task unfulfilled, if it had not supplemented its prognostications by a backward glance over the intellectual life of the eighteenth century.

This retrospect was supplied by Barante (1809) in his remarkable book, *Tableau de la Littérature Française au Dix-huitième Siècle*.

Prosper de Barante, born in 1782 of an old and distinguished bureaucrat family of Auvergne, is the one member of our group who cannot be described as an *émigré*; for he took office under the Empire as Prefect in La Vendée. His book, however, partakes of the general character of the Emigrant Literature ; nor is this surprising, for he lived far from Paris, was on intimate terms with the exiles, especially with Mme. de Staël, and in disfavour with the Government on account of his frequent visits to Coppet. He also shared Mme. de Staël's partiality for foreign, more particularly German, literature, which was another offence in the days of the Empire. He translated all Schiller's plays. After the restoration of the monarchy, he acquired political influence as a member of the moderate Liberal party.

The work on France in the eighteenth century with which, at the age of twenty-seven, Barante made his début in literature, reveals a maturity and moderation surprising in so young an author, but which may be explained, partly by a certain lack of warmth in his nature, partly by his

official position. In all the books which we have just glanced at, there lay an implicit judgment of the eighteenth century; in this we have the first connected survey and estimate of it. The survey is a brief but excellent one; the general conception of the period is philosophically based; the presentment is clear and passionless; but the estimate is very faulty, on every side conditioned and hampered by those limits beyond which the authors of the *Emigrant Literature* were incapable of seeing. This settlement with the past century, in which the new generation renounces all connection with the old, is not a final settlement, and is far from being as unprejudiced as it is passionless. Barante has the honest desire to judge impartially, and emphasises the fact that he is the better qualified to do so since he does not belong to the generation which took immediate part in the Revolution as destroyers or defenders of the old social order; but his intellect is not as unbiassed as his will; his whole development is, though he does not know it, conditioned by the reaction against that century the character of which he, as observer and thinker, undertakes to explain.

Barante's standpoint is a suggestive, and was in those days an uncommon one. He hears it constantly asserted that the authors of the eighteenth century were responsible for the revolution which at the close of that century shook France to its very foundations, and this assertion he considers a baseless one. It contains an injustice to those authors, from the fact that it attributes too much significance to them. If the building had not been ready to fall, that literary puff of wind would not have sufficed to blow it over. Contemporaneously with Nodier and Mme. de Staël, he formulates and interprets the proposition: Literature is the expression of the state of society, not its cause. In his opinion, the Seven Years' War had a great deal more to do with the weakening of authority in France than had the *Encyclopedia*, and the profanity which prevailed at the court of old Louis XIV., at the time when he was cruelly persecuting both the Protestants and the Jansenists, did more to undermine reverence for religion than the attacks and jeers

of the philosophers. He is very far from ascribing any particular merit to the literature of the preceding century, but he regards it as merely "a symptom of the general disease." With historical penetration he searches for the omens of the collapse of monarchy, and finds them much further back, in the results of the conflict between Mazarin and the Fronde. Held down by the iron hand of Richelieu, princes, nobles, and officials, all the great in turn, had made a bid for popular support, and by so doing had lost in dignity and consideration. The power of royalty alone remained totally unaffected. The waves of opposition rolled to the steps of the throne, but stopped there; during the first half of Louis XIV.'s reign the throne stood in more solitary elevation than ever over the general level. Richelieu's work was accomplished; every power in the land, except that of the throne, was destroyed. If this one remaining authority were undermined, then all the powers of society would stand bereft of the veneration which had constituted their strength; and this was very sufficiently done during Louis XIV.'s miserable old age, the insolent rule of the Regency, and the wanton, foolish rule of Louis XV.

The philosophy of the eighteenth century, then, according to Barante, was not the conscious work of any individual or individuals, but represented the general bent of the mind of the people; it was written, so to speak, at their dictation. This did not add to its value; to his thinking, all that this philosophy accomplished was to overturn an immoral and inequitable government in an immoral and inequitable manner. But what thus happened, happened of necessity. The soul of Barante's book is the firmest faith in historical laws. "The human mind," he says, "seems as irrevocably appointed to run a prescribed course as are the stars." He knows that there is at all times a necessary connection between literature and the condition of society; but whereas this connection is at times indistinct, requiring penetration to detect it, and careful demonstration to prove it plainly, in the period under consideration it seems to him so plain that no nice observation is required to discover it.

The first reason for this he finds in the relation of the writers to their readers. In earlier times the number of the former had been very small ; thinly scattered over the whole of Europe, they had written in a dead language. In those days there was no social life, and conversation had not become a power. Authors did not write for society but for each other, and society in return looked upon them as uninteresting pedants. In time culture and enlightenment spread among the higher classes, and writers entered into relation with them ; they wrote for princes and courtiers, for the little class which did not need to work. In the days of Louis XIV. authors tried to please this class, and were flattered by its approbation. But by degrees civilisation spread until a real reading public came into existence, a public which made the author independent of the great. Frederick the Second of Prussia, who, to shed lustre upon his reign, called Voltaire to his court, did not treat him with the condescension shown by Louis XIV. to Molière, but seemed to place him by his side as an equal. The greatest political and the greatest intellectual powers of the age stood for a moment upon an equal footing, without any one discerning that the time was approaching when these two powers were to declare war upon each other. And in the last half of the century there was unintermitted reciprocity between men of letters and society in general.

In the olden times a philosopher had been a severe, systematic thinker, who, careless of approbation, developed a connected system. The word had changed its meaning now ; the philosopher was no longer a solitary thinker, but a man of the world, who conversed more than he wrote or taught, who invariably sought to please society and win its approbation, and who did this by making himself its organ. Barante sees an evidence of the powerful influence exercised by the spirit of the times upon individual writers in the circumstance that authors, such, for instance, as the Abbé de Mably, who had the strongest antipathy to the philosophers of the fashionable school, nevertheless resembled the very men they opposed, and arrived at the same results by different means. And he finds in

the unpatriotic classical education of the upper classes the explanation of the fact that the public forestalled the men of letters in neglecting and slighting their own historical traditions and national memories for the sake of laboriously appropriated exotic ideals. At school the child learned to spell the names of Epaminondas and Leonidas long before he heard of Bayard or Du Guesclin; he was encouraged to take a deep interest in the Trojan wars, but no one dreamt of interesting him in the Crusades. Roman law, the principles of which are the outcome of autocratic rule, had gradually superseded those Germanic laws, which were the outcome of the life of a free people. What wonder then, that when authors turned to antiquity for their subject-matter, and grew enthusiastic on the subject of Greece and Rome, they found a ready audience in French society! What wonder that in literature also, national tradition was slighted and broken!

Having thus in advance laid the blame on society of all the mistakes made by literature in the eighteenth century (and its achievements appear to him to be one and all mistakes), Barante has provided himself with the basis for a calm appraisal of the individual eminent writers. In his appreciations we have the views scattered throughout the *Emigrant Literature* concentrated and, as it were, brought to a focus.

Voltaire, whose reputation had, since his death, been made the subject of as much hot dispute as the body of Patroclus, he criticises coldly, but without animosity. He admires his natural gifts, the easily stirred, impetuous feeling that produced his pathos, the irresistible fascination of his eloquence and his wit, and the charm that lies in his genial facility in shaping and expressing thoughts. But he sees the use Voltaire made of his talents, sees how he allowed himself to be led by the opinions of the time, by the desire to succeed, to please. He laments the tendency to shameless, irreverent mockery, which characterised Voltaire even as an old man. And this is all. For what was just, for what was great in Voltaire's life-warfare he has no eyes, no word. He professes to criticise Voltaire impartially, and yet

he, as it were, juggles away the indignation that was in his soul, that which was the very breath of life in him ; he calls the persecutions of Voltaire stupid, but never once wicked ; he excuses, not the blots on Voltaire's greatness, but, as it were, the greatness itself—and it is evident that he really desires to be impartial, since he excuses.

Of all the great authors of the past century, Montesquieu is the only one for whom Barante expresses any really warm admiration. This is natural enough, for in him he recognised some of his own qualities. Montesquieu was not the ordinary author who could let his pen run away with him ; he was, like Barante himself, an official, a high official, a famous lawyer, who was obliged to consider the dignity of his position and the effect of his example. "President Montesquieu," says Barante, "was not in that position of independence which men of letters prize so highly, and which is possibly injurious both to their talents and their characters." One is sensible of the cautious attempt at self-vindication made in this ingenious paradox by the imperial official who was at enmity with the Emperor. But whatever the cause, Barante made no mistake in rating Montesquieu very highly. Other authors of his period had more genius, but Montesquieu's accurate knowledge of practical life, of administration and government, gave him an insight which the others lacked, and a moderation on which high value was set at the beginning of this century. In Montesquieu Barante approves of things which he censures bitterly in others. He invites the reader to compare Montesquieu's work, *De l'Esprit des Lois*, with an older work by Domat on the same subject, in order to see the progress in philosophy made by Montesquieu, who, treating religion with all due reverence, nevertheless regards it as a subordinate matter.<sup>1</sup>

Diderot is the author against whom Barante is most biassed ; in judging him he shows himself extremely narrow-minded ; he allows Diderot's precipitancy and violence to blind him to his genius. A genius whose reck-

<sup>1</sup> Alors on pourra distinguer, comment la religion, respectée par Montesquieu, était pourtant jugée par lui, tandis que Domat l'avait seulement adorée, et en avait fait tout découler au lieu de la considérer comme accessoire.

lessness ever and again reminds one of the recklessness of an elemental force, was as little comprehensible to Barante as to the rest of the alarmed, disillusioned generation to which he belongs. Diderot was better calculated to please the Germans, who were unprejudiced in intellectual matters, than his own over-sensitive countrymen of this period. Goethe himself translated *Le Neveu de Rameau*, and Hegel treated of it exhaustively in his *Phänomenologie des Geistes*. But Barante, passionately condemning Diderot's incessant and unbridled attacks upon religion, sums him up in these words: "His inner man was ardent and disorderly, his mind was a fire without fuel, and the talent of which he showed *some gleams* was never put to any systematic use." It was but natural that the eighteenth-century writer who had the profoundest understanding of nature, should be held in lowest esteem by the young idealists.

Rousseau, the last of the writers of the eighteenth century cited before the bar of the nineteenth, had characteristics which necessarily appealed to Barante. He was the only sentimentalist among these writers, and the new century had begun sentimentally. He was the most solitary of them, and the new century appreciated the isolated personality. He stood quite apart from the philosophers and Encyclopedists; his character had been formed by a strange and unhappy life; he was uninfluenced by society or public opinion. Without family, friends, position, or country, he had wandered about the world, and, on his first appearance as an author, he had condemned society instead of flattering it; instead of giving in to public opinion, he tried to alter it; his attempt was successful, and where others pleased, he roused enthusiasm. All this was certain to appeal to Barante. But one has only to compare Barante's pronouncement on Rousseau with that published twenty years earlier by his friend Mme. de Staël, to see what progress the reaction against the spirit of the previous century has made. That he dwells at length on the impurity of Rousseau's life and the bad points in his character is in itself quite justifiable, and in this matter his criticism only presents the natural contrast to Mme. de



Stael's warm apologetics. His severe judgment of Rousseau's political doctrines is the result of more critical, mature reflection than Mme. de Staël's woman-like attempt to vindicate them up to a certain point. But in his appreciation of Rousseau's attempts at religious reform, he is far from reaching her level. His principal objection to the famous Confession of Faith, to the so-called natural religion, is that it is a religion without public worship. "Nor can we wonder at this," he says, "for to a morality without deeds, like Rousseau's, a religion without worship is the inevitable corollary." His bias towards inference-drawing in favour of the existing, actually led this free-thinking critic to defend the traditional usages of the Church against Rousseau.

At the bottom of all this narrow-mindedness and injustice of Barante's, lay what lay at the root of much that was false and perverted in other Liberal writers during the two following decades, namely, that spiritualistic philosophy which was now making its way into France, and which, after encountering much resistance, became dominant; nay, was actually, under Cousin and his school, elevated to the rank of State philosophy. Had this philosophy been content to develop its principles and ideas as clearly and convincingly as possible, it would have been a philosophy like any other, would have roused opposition, but never enmity and detestation. But its champions, from the very beginning, and in almost every country into which it found its way, displayed unscientific and ill-omened tendencies. They were less anxious to prove their theories than to vindicate the moral and religious tendency of these theories. They were far less bent upon refuting their opponents than upon denying them feeling for what is noble, high enthusiasms, sense of duty, and ardour.

Mme. de Staël's dread of sensationalism was not a dread of the philosophy in itself, but of its consequences. The noble-hearted woman, who, with all her love of truth, was never anything but a dilettante in philosophy, was possessed by a naïve fear that sensationalistic psychology would lead men to submit unresistingly to the tyranny of Napoleon; so, out of

love for liberty, she took up arms against it. Barantè, as a man, has not her excuse. To him also, however, Descartes and Leibnitz are not only great thinkers, but represent the principle of *good* in metaphysics ; as if there were any place for moral principles in metaphysics. "Possibly," he observes, "they at times lost themselves in misty regions, but at least they pursued an *upward* direction ; their teaching harmonises with the thoughts which move us when we reflect profoundly on ourselves ; and this path necessarily led to the *noblest* of sciences, to religion and morality." He goes on to describe how men grew weary of following them, and turned to follow in the path of Locke and Hume, whose doctrine he describes, not as a contradictory though equally justifiable one-sidedness, but as a degradation of human nature, a prostitution of science. He thinks it natural that Spinoza (whom he couples with Hobbes) should be opposed not only with reasons, but "with indignation."<sup>1</sup>

He confronts the empiricists with Kant's famous doctrine that the pure notions of the understanding have their sources in the nature of the soul, and that an innate fundamental conception of religion is to be found at all times and in all races. Always and everywhere, he says, there is to be found the belief in a life after death, reverence for the dead, burial of the dead in the certainty that life has not ended for them, and, finally, the belief that the universe had a beginning and will have an end. These are to him, much as they were to Benjamin Constant, the spiritual elements which constitute the firm foundation of religion. He does not realise that they may be resolved into still simpler elements, which are to be found unconnected with religious feeling. For he does not investigate freely, independently, but esteems it an honour to succeed to what he calls "le glorieux héritage de la haute philosophie."

In a precisely similar manner he inveighs against attempts to place morality upon an empirical basis. "Instead," he says, "of starting from the feeling of justice and sympathy which dwells in the hearts of all men, people have

<sup>1</sup> *De la Litt. Française*, p. 213.

tried to base morality upon the instinct of self-preservation and utility." He clearly has no comprehension whatever of the profound philosophic instinct which has led the thinkers of the opposite school to resolve the idea of justice into its first elements, and show how it originates and takes shape. He merely writes bombastically and indignantly of the impossibility of arriving by such processes at revealed religion, "the divine proofs of which unbelief had rejected."<sup>1</sup> The same man who praises Montesquieu's *Lettres Persanes*, and approves of that author's qualification of religion as a secondary matter, is, with the half-heartedness of the period, horrified by the attempt of the empirical philosophers to discover the elements which go to the construction of the idea of justice. Hence it is that we find in Barante the beginnings of that foolish play upon the double meaning\* of the word sensualism, which was to be throughout the century a weapon in the hands of hypocrisy and baseness—the word being used at one time as the appellation of the particular philosophy sometimes known by that name, at another as the equivalent for sensuality, or yet again for the doctrine that sensual pleasures are the aim of life. Barante, like Cousin, defends the superficial and unscientific spiritualism which flourished in France in the first decades of this century as a philosophy which encouraged virtue and morality.

Mme. de Staël wrote a notice of Barante's book for one of the newspapers of the day, the *Mercur de France*. The censor forbade it to be printed at the time, but it was published later, without alterations. It is only three pages long, but a critic needs no further evidence to convince him of the genius of the writer. She begins with some warm words of admiration for the maturity and rare moderation of the young author, only regretting that he does not more frequently abandon himself to his impressions, and reminding him that restraint does not always imply strength. Then, as if in a flash, she perceives beneath the incidental and personal merits and defects of the book the intellectual character of the new century. The consideration of this

<sup>1</sup> On arriva bientôt à tout nier ; déjà l'incrédulité avait rejeté les preuves divines de la révélation et avait abjuré les devoirs et les souvenirs chrétiens.

work seems to have suddenly and forcibly revealed to her to what an extent she herself, with her cheerful, reformatory energy, was a product of the preceding century with its firm faith in progress. Barante's book is to her an intimation that the period of transition is at an end ; she is amazed by the despondent resignation to circumstances, the fatalism, the reverence for the accomplished fact, which meet her in its pages. She divines that this despondent resignation to the pressure of circumstance will be one of the features of the new period ; she has the presentiment that its philosophy will to a great extent consist of demonstrations that the real is the rational ; and she seems, with the far-sightedness of genius, to discern how ambiguous that word "the real" will prove to be, and how much irreflective acquiescence in the existing the maxim will entail. She closes her review with these words of prophetic wisdom :—

"The eighteenth century proclaimed principles in a too unconditional manner ; possibly the nineteenth century will explain facts in a spirit of too great resignation to them. The eighteenth believed in the nature of things, the nineteenth will only believe in the force of circumstances. The eighteenth desired to control the future, the nineteenth confines itself to the attempt to understand mankind. The author of this book is perhaps the first who is very distinctly tinged with the colour of the new century."

The style and the matter of this utterance are equally striking. Of all the notable men with whom Mme. de Staël was acquainted, not one had so distinctly separated himself from the preceding century as this youngest among them, Barante. The others, one after the other, had left the sinking ship of the eighteenth century, and gone on board the ship of the nineteenth, loading it by degrees with all the goods and seed-corn that it was to carry ; but it still lay side by side with the wreck, made fast to it. It was Barante who cut the cables and sent the vessel out into the wide ocean.

## XV

### CONCLUSION

THE literary group the formation and development of which we have been following, produces the impression of an interwoven whole. Multitudes of threads that cross and recross each other stretch from the one work to the other ; this exposition has only made the connection clear ; it has not taken separate entities and arbitrarily woven them together. It is to be noted that this collection of writings, this set of writers, form a group, not a school. A group is the result of the natural, unintentional connection between minds and works which have a common tendency ; a school is the result of the conscious fellowship of authors who have submitted themselves to the guidance of some more or less distinctly formulated conviction.

The Emigrant Literature, although French, develops beyond the frontiers of France. In order to understand it, we must keep before our minds that short and violently agitated period in which the old order was abolished, the principle of legitimacy was discarded, the ruling classes were humiliated and ruined, and positive religion was set aside by men who had freed themselves from its yoke rather by the help of a pugnacious philosophy than by scientific culture—men whose ruthless and not always honourable mode of warfare had irritated all those who were more or less dimly sensible of injustice in the charges directed against the old order of things, and whose intellectual, moral, and emotional cravings found no satisfaction in the new. The more unreal and impracticable the ideas of the rights and the progress of humanity proved themselves to be, the more certain did it become that an intellectual rebound must be at hand. It came ; the reaction began. I have shown how at first it was only a partial reaction, how the ideas

of the Revolution were invariably blended with the ideas which inspire the revulsion against Voltaire ; we have seen that the intellectual point of departure of all its leaders lay in the eighteenth century, and that they were all liable to be affected by reminiscences, and subject to relapse. They all proceed, so to speak, from Rousseau. Their first step is simply to take his weapons and direct them against his antagonist Voltaire. Only the youngest of them, Barante, can with truth deny kinship with Rousseau.

These men are followed by a second set of authors whose aim is the preservation of society. They also are for the most part *émigrés*, and they advocate unconditional reaction. Their writings, along with single works of authors like Chateaubriand, who are progressive in art but reactionary in their attitude towards Church and State, and certain youthful reactionary works of future Liberal and even Radical writers like Lamartine and Hugo, form a group characterised by unconditional adherence to the old—the ruling idea in them being the principle of authority. Amongst the leading men of this set are Joseph de Maistre, Bonald, and Lamennais.

But under the title "Emigrant Literature," I have gathered together and drawn attention to the more healthy literary productions, in which the reaction has not as yet become subjection to authority, but is the natural and justifiable defence of feeling, soul, passion, and poetry, against frigid intellectuality, exact calculation, and a literature stifled by rules and dead traditions, like that which continued to prolong its feeble and bloodless existence in France under the Empire. The following group, more closely united in its submission to one dominant principle, has necessarily a clearer, sharper outline ; but the one at present in question has more life, more feeling, more restless power.

We see the writers and writings of the Emigrant Literature as it were in a tremulous light. It is in the dawn of the new century that they stand, these men ; the first beams of the morning sun of the nineteenth century fall upon them, and slowly disperse the veil of Ossianic mist and Wertherian melancholy which envelops them. One feels

that a night of terror and bloodshed lies behind them ; their faces are pale and serious. But their grief is poetical, their melancholy awakes sympathy, and one is conscious of fermenting forces in the passionate outbursts which betray their mortification at being obliged, instead of continuing the work of the day before, to regard the foundation laid that day with suspicion, and to gather together laboriously the fragments left by the havoc of the night.

The Emigrant Literature is a profoundly agitated literature. Chateaubriand leads the way with the stormy passion and the powerful, brilliant landscape-painting of his novels. In them everything glows and flames with Catholic ecstasy and Satanic passion ; but in the midst of the flames stands, like a figure hewn in stone, the modern personality, the egoistic, solitary genius, René.

Sénancour produces a work in which, in a peculiarly soulful manner, modern liberal thought is fused with Romantic yearnings, Teutonic sentimentality and idealism with Latin refined sensuousness, the rebellious inclination to sift every question to the bottom with the despondency that dreams of suicide.

Nodier mingles his voice in the chorus. Subtle, versatile, fantastic, possessed by the spirit of opposition, he attacks Napoleon and the existing state of society, and panegyrises Klopstock and conventual life. Naive as a child and learned as an old man, he seeks martyrdom for the pleasure of being persecuted and for the sake of being able to pursue his studies in solitude. Constantly progressing, he makes belief in progress the subject of incessant satire.

Constant makes his appearance as a politician, and also as a dilettante in fiction who puts masters to shame. His mind sways like a pendulum between the ideas of two periods. By nature he is the child of the eighteenth century, but his culture and his aims are those of the period of the syntheses and the constitutions. In his one imaginative work he presents his contemporaries with a model of psychological character-drawing, and directs their attention to all the good feelings and energies that are sacrificed to the laws of modern society.

But it is in Mme. de Staël that the Emigrant Literature first becomes conscious of its aims and its best tendencies. It is this woman whose figure dominates the group. In her writings there is collected the best of that which is valid in the productions of the exiles. The tendency to return to the past, and the tendency to press onwards to the future, which produce discordancy in the actions and writings of the other members of the group, in her case combine to produce an endeavour which is neither reactionary nor revolutionary, but reformatory. Like the others, she draws her first inspiration from Rousseau, like the others, she deplores the excesses of the Revolution, but better than any of the others, she loves personal and political freedom. She wages war with absolutism in the State and hypocrisy in society, with national arrogance and religious prejudice. She teaches her countrymen to appreciate the characteristics and literature of the neighbouring nations; she breaks down with her own hand the wall of self-sufficiency with which victorious France had surrounded itself. Barante, with his perspective view of eighteenth-century France, only continues and completes her work.

Naturally connected with the Emigrant Literature is that German Romanticism by which Mme. de Staël was influenced in the last period of her activity, and the influence of which is also to be traced in Barante. The whole group of books to which I have given the common name Emigrant Literature may be described as a species of Romanticism anticipating more especially the great Romantic School of France. But it is also in touch with the German spirit and its Romanticism, often from unconscious sympathy, at times directly influenced by it. Hence it is that in her book on Germany Mme. de Staël calls Rousseau, Bernardin de Saint Pierre, and Chateaubriand unconscious Germans, and hence it is that we find the men and women of the Emigrant Literature every now and again showing a tendency to Romanticism, or interesting themselves in the word and the idea.

But they not only herald the great authors who are to



succeed them ; they are in a very remarkable manner their prototypes. As a Romantic colourist Chateaubriand anticipates Victor Hugo, in his melancholy ennui he anticipates Byron. Long before the days of the Romantic School, Sénancour touches the chords which are afterwards sounded by Sainte-Beuve. Nodier, with his philological and archæological erudition, his pure, austere prose, his fantastic and unpleasant themes, is the precursor of Mérimée. Long before the time of the great French novelists, Constant gives us Balzac's heroines ; as a politician, although liberal and anti-clerical, he has some points of resemblance with an emphatically Romantic politician, the German, Gentz. Barante, with his spiritualistic and yet fatalistic literary philosophy, prepares the way for the criticism and æstheticism which were to be enthroned in high places in the days of Victor Cousin. Mme. de Staël seems to announce the greatest authoress of the century, a woman who possessed less elevation of mind than herself, but more genius and fecundity, the poetess and philosopher, George Sand.

The literary history of a whole continent during half a century obviously does not begin at any one single point. The point of departure chosen by the historian may always be described as arbitrary and fortuitous ; he must trust to his instinct and critical faculty, or he will never make a beginning at all. To me the Emigrant Literature seemed the natural starting-point indicated by history itself. Looked at from one point of view, this group prepares the way for the later religious and political reaction in French literature ; looked at from another, it prepares the way for the Romantic School in France. It is the best of introductions to the study and understanding of the Romantic School in Germany ; it has even points of contact with such remote phenomena as Byron and Balzac.

In a word, the Emigrant Literature constitutes the prologue to the great literary drama of the century.

